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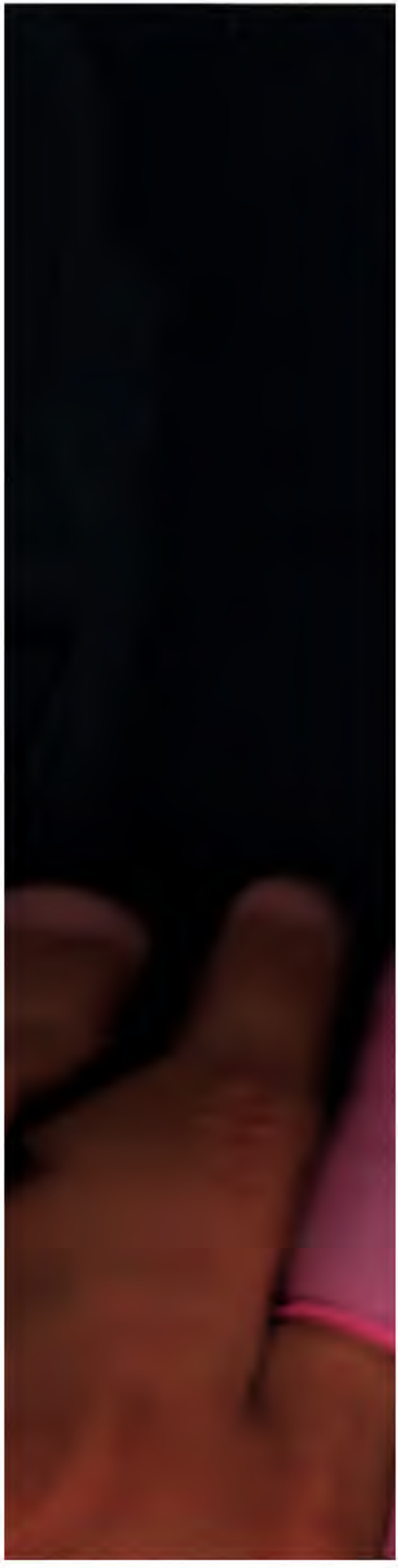
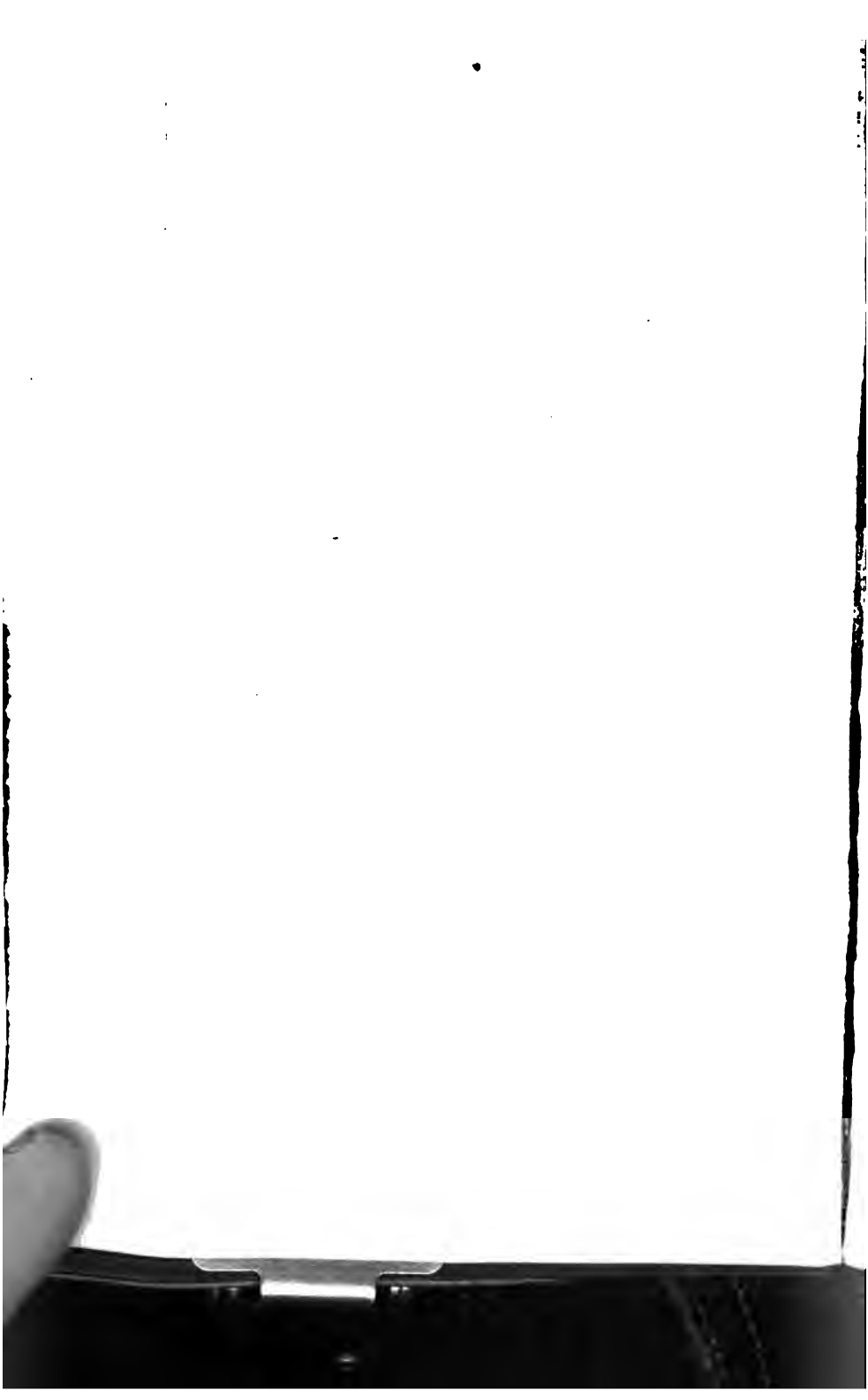
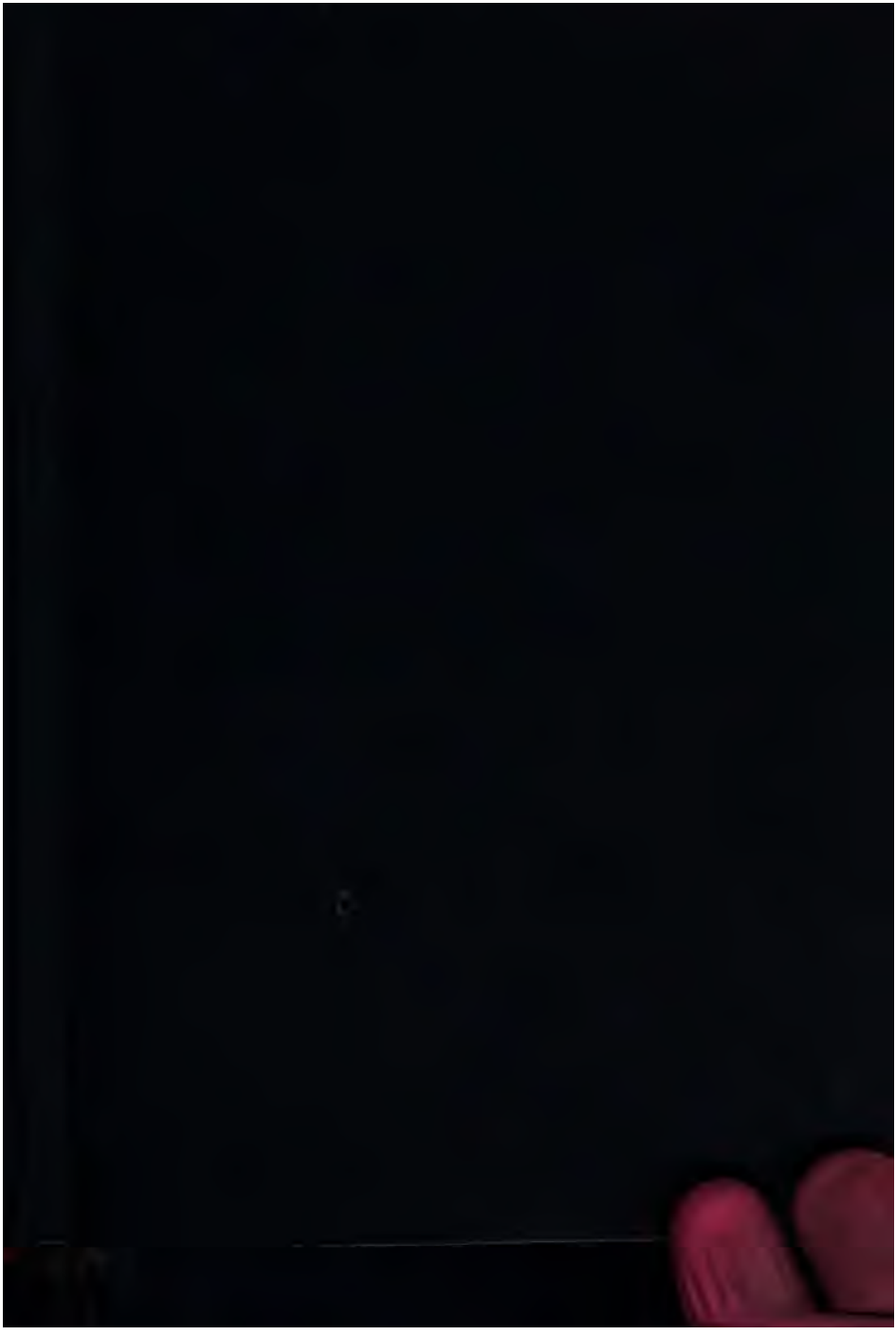




I am Edna
but I don't believe it!



Todd, Margaret Georgina.

MONA MACLEAN

MEDICAL STUDENT

A NOVEL

BY

GRAHAM TRAVERS

TENTH EDITION

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS
EDINBURGH AND LONDON
MDCCCXCIV

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CONTENTS.

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	IN THE GARDEN,	1
II.	THE LISTS,	7
III.	"ADOLESCENT INSANITY,"	9
IV.	SIR DOUGLAS,	14
V.	"AN AGATE KNIFE-EDGE,"	26
VI.	THE NÆRODAL,	30
VII.	A SON OF ANAK,	40
VIII.	*BONS CAMARADES*,	50
IX.	DORIS,	67
X.	BORROWNESS,	81
XI.	THE SHOP,	89
XII.	CASTLE MACLEAN,	98
XIII.	THE CHAPEL,	108
XIV.	REACTION,	114
XV.	THE BOTANISTS,	121
XVI.	"JOHN HOGG'S MACHINE,"	126
XVII.	AUNTIE BELL,	133
XVIII.	A SILHOUETTE,	137
XIX.	"LEAVES OF GRASS,"	143
XX.	ST RULES,	156
XXI.	THE FLYING SCOTCHMAN,	162
XXII.	DR ALICE BATESON,	175
XXIII.	A RENCONTRE,	181
XXIV.	A CLINICAL REPORT,	192
XXV.	A VOICE IN THE FOG,	197
XXVI.	A CHAT BY THE FIRE,	204
XXVII.	A NEOPHYTE,	209

XXVIII. THE COLONEL'S YARN, ... 221
XXIX. "YONDER SHINING LIGHT," 232
XXX. MR STUART'S TROUBLES, ... 238
XXXI. STRADIVARIUS, ... 244
XXXII. CHUMS, ... 255
XXXIII. CARBOLIC! 259
XXXIV. PALM-TREES AND PINES, ... 265
XXXV. WEEPING AND LAUGHTER, ... 275
XXXVI. NORTHERN MISTS, ... 284
XXXVII. THE ALGÆ AND FUNGI, ... 290
XXXVIII. THE BAZAAR, ... 298
XXXIX. THE BALL, ... 308
XL. A LOCUM TENENS, ... 318
XLI. A SINGED BUTTERFLY, ... 326
XLII. QUESTIONINGS, ... 333
XLIII. "MITHER!" 337
XLIV. A CRIMSON STREAK, ... 342
XLV. AN UNBELIEVER, ... 346
XLVI. FAREWELL TO BORROWNESS, ... 354
XLVII. THE DISSECTING-ROOM, ... 364
XLVIII. CONFIDENCES, ... 378
XLIX. THE INTERMEDIATE, ... 383
L. SUCCESS OR FAILURE? 389
LI. ANOTHER CHAT BY THE FIRE, ... 399
LII. OLD FRIENDS, ... 407
LIII. WAITING, ... 415
LIV. PRESENTATION DAY, ... 421
LV. LUCY TO THE RESCUE, ... 425
LVI. A LOST CHANCE, ... 431
LVII. HAVING IT OUT, ... 436
LVIII. "LOVE MAY GO HANG!" 447
LIX. AT LAST! 453
LX. ON THE RIVER, ... 458
LXI. A *FIN-DE-SIECLE* COURTSHIP, ... 461
LXII. IN ARCADIA, ... 467
LXIII. "VARIUM ET MUTABILE," 471
LXIV. PARTNERS, ... 473

MONA MACLEAN,

MEDICAL STUDENT.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE GARDEN.

"I WISH I were dead!"

"H'm. You look like it."

There was no reply for a second or two. The first speaker was carefully extricating herself from the hammock in which she had been idly swinging under the shade of a smoke-begrimed lime-tree.

"No," she said at last, shaking out the folds of her dainty blue gown, "I flatter myself that I do not look like it. I have often told you, my dear Mona, that from the point of view of success in practice, the art of dressing one's hair is at least as important as the art of dissecting."

She gave an adjusting touch to her dark-red curls and drew herself to her full height, as though she were defying the severest critic to say that she did not live up to her principles. Presently her whole bearing collapsed, so to speak, into abject despair, half real, half assumed. "But I do wish I were dead, all the same," she said.

"Well, I don't see why you should make me wish it too. Why don't you go on with your book?"

"Go on with it! I like that! I never began. I have not turned a page for the last half-hour. That's all the credit I get for my self-repression! What time is it?"

"A quarter past twelve."

"Is that all? And the lists won't be up till two. When shall we start?"

"About three, if we are wise—when the crush is over."

"Thank you! I mean to be there when the clock strikes two. There won't be any crush. It's not like the Matric; and besides, every one has gone down. I am sure I wish I had! A telegram 'strikes home,' but the slow torture of wading through those lists——!"

She broke off abruptly, and Mona returned to her book, but before she had read half-a-dozen lines a parasol was inserted between her eyes and the page.

"It will be a treat, won't it?—wiring to the other students that everybody has passed but me!"

"Lucy, you are intolerable. Have you finished packing?"

"Practically."

"Do you mean to travel half the night in that gown?"

"Not being a millionaire like you, I do not. You little know the havoc this frock has to work yet. But I presume you would not have me walk down to Burlington House in my old serge?"

"Why not? You say everybody is out of town."

"Precisely. Therefore we, the exceptions, will be all the more *en évidence*. *I* don't mean to be taken for an 'advanced woman.' Some of the Barts. men will be there, and——"

But Mona was not listening. She had risen from the cushions on which she had been lounging, and was pacing up and down the grass.

"You know, Mona, you may say what you please, but you are rather white about the gills yourself, and *you* have no cause to be."

Mona stopped and shot a level glance at her companion.

"Why not?" she said. "Because I have been ploughed once already, and so should be used to skinning like the eels?"

"Nonsense! How you contrived to fail once neither I nor any one else can pretend to explain, but certain it is that, with the best of will, you won't achieve the feat a second time. You will be in the Honours list, of course."

Mona shrugged her shoulders. "Possibly," she said quietly, "if I pass. But the question is, shall I pass?

> 'Oh the little more, and how much it is!
> And the little less, and what worlds away!'"

They were walking up and down together now.

"And even if you don't—it will be a disgrace to the examiners, of course, and a frightful fag, but beyond that I don't see that it matters. There is no one to care."

Mona's cheek flushed. She raised her eyebrows, and turned her head very slowly towards her companion, with a glance of enquiry.

"I mean," Lucy said hastily, "you are—that is to say, you are not a country clergyman's daughter like me. If I fail, it will be the talk of the parish. The grocer will condole with me over the counter, the postman will carry the news on his rounds, and the farmers will hear all about it when they come in to market next Wednesday. It will be awfully hard on the Pater; he——"

"From what I know of him, I think he will be able to hold up his head in spite of it."

They both laughed.

"By the way, that reminds me"—and Lucy produced a letter from her pocket—"he is awfully anxious that you should come to us for a few weeks this vacation. You have no idea what a conquest you have made in that quarter. In fact I have been shining with reflected lustre ever since he met you. He thinks there must be something in me after all, since I have had the sense to appreciate you."

"I wonder wherein the attraction between us lies," Mona

said reflectively. "I suppose I am really less grave than I appear, and you on the whole are less of a flibbertigibbet than the world takes you to be. So we meet on something of a common ground. I see in you a side of my nature which in the ordinary course of events I don't find it easy to express, and possibly you see something of the same sort in me. Each of us relieves the other of the necessity——"

"Don't prose, please!" interrupted Lucy. "I never yet found the smallest difficulty in expressing myself, and—the saints be praised!—you are not always quite so dull as you are to-day. I suppose you won't come? What are tennis-parties and picnics to a Wandering Jew like you?"

"It is awfully kind of your father. I can't tell you how much I appreciate his goodness; but I am afraid I can't come."

"I thought so. Is it the North Pole or the wilds of Arabia this time?"

Mona laughed. "To tell the truth," she said, "I must have a day with my accounts and my bank-book before I stir from Gower Street."

"What! *you*, Crœsus?"

"The reproach is deserved, whether you meant it for one or not. I have been spending too much. What with extra laboratory work in winter, and coaching last term——"

"And all those pretty dresses."

"And all those pretty dresses," repeated Mona, with the air of one who is making a deliberate confession.

"And nice damp uncut volumes."

"Not too many of those," with a defiant little nod of self-defence.

"And divers charities."

"Nay, alas! My bank-book has not suffered much from them."

"And concert tickets, and gloves for impecunious friends, not to say a couple of excellent stalls from time to time——"

"Nonsense, Lucy! Considering how hard we have worked, I don't think you and I have been at all extravagant in our

amusements. No, no, I ought to be able to afford all that. My father left me four hundred a year, more or less."

"Good heavens!" If Mona had added a cipher, the sum could scarcely have impressed her companion more.

"There! that is so like you schoolgirls——"

"Schoolgirls, indeed!"

"You have your allowance of thirty or forty pounds, and you flatter yourselves that you dress on it, travel on it, amuse yourselves on it, and surreptitiously feed on it. You never notice the countless things that come to you from your parents, as naturally as the air you breathe. You go with your mother to her cupboards and store closets, or with your father to town, and all the time you are absorbing money or money's worth. Then you get into debt; there is a scene, a few tears, and your father's hand goes into his pocket, and you find yourself with your debts paid, and a pound or two to the good. I know all about it. Your allowance is the sheerest farce. Cut off all those chances and possibilities, banish the very conception of elasticity from your mind, before you judge of my income."

Lucy's eyes had been fixed on the ground. She raised them now, and said very slowly, with a trick of manner she had caught from her friend,—

"I don't think I ever heard such a one-sided statement in my life."

Mona laughed. "Every revolution and reformation the world has seen has been the fruit of a one-sided statement."

"I have already asked you not to prose. Besides, your good seed has fallen on stony ground for once. Please don't attempt to revolutionise or reform me!"

"My dear, if you indulge in the pedantry of quotation from ancient Jewish literature, pray show some familiarity with the matter of it. Although, as you remind me, I am not a country clergyman's daughter, you will allow me to remind *you* that the seed on the stony ground did spring up."

"Bother the seed on stony ground! You said your income was four hundred a year."

"More or less. This year it happens to be less, and I have a strong suspicion that I am in shallow water. If, as I fervently hope, my suspicion is incorrect, I mean to have a fortnight's walking in Skye. In any case, I have promised to spend a month on the east coast of Scotland with a cousin of my father's."

"I thought you had no cousins?"

"No more I have—to call cousins. I never saw this one, and I don't suppose I should ever have heard of her if she had not written to borrow twenty pounds from me a few years ago. She is quite comfortably off now, but she cannot get over her gratitude. I don't suppose she is exactly what you would call a lady. My grandfather was the successful man of the family in his generation, and my father was the same in the next; so it is my fault if cousin Rachel and I have *not* 'gone off on different lines.'"

"But why do you go to her?"

"I don't know. It is an old promise—in fact, she wants me to live with her altogether—and I am curious to see my 'ancestral towers.'"

"And have you no other relatives?"

Mona laughed. "My mother's sister has just come home from India with her husband, but we are just as far apart as when continents and oceans divided us. I don't think my mother and she quite hit it off. Besides, I can imagine her opinion of medical women, and I don't suppose she ever heard of blessed Bloomsbury."

"Wait a little," said Lucy. "When you are a famous physician——"

"I know—bowling along on C springs——'

"Drawn by a pair of prancing, high-stepping greys——"

"Leaning back on the luxurious cushions——"

"Wrapt to the ears in priceless sables——"

"My waiting-room crowded with patient Duchesses. Yes, of course, she will be sorry then. I suppose she will have an illness, some 'obscure internal lesion' which will puzzle all the London doctors. As a last resource she will apply

to me. I wave my wand. Hey, presto! she is cured! But you can't expect her to foresee all that. It would argue more than average intelligence, and besides, it would spoil the story."

CHAPTER II.

THE LISTS.

There was no doubt about it. The lists were up.

As the girls passed through the bar from Vigo Street, they could see a little knot of men, silent and eager, gathered on the steps in front of the notice-case. Those who had secured a good position were leisurely entering sundry jottings in their note-books; those behind were straining their eyes, straining every muscle in their bodies, in the endeavour to ascertain the one all-important fact.

"I told you we should have waited," Mona said quietly, striving to make the most of a somewhat limited stock of breath.

"If you tell me the name of the person you are interested in, perhaps I can help you," said a tall man who was standing beside them.

"Oh, thank you," Mona smiled pleasantly. "We can wait. We—are interested in—in several people."

He stood aside to let them pass in front of him, and in a few minutes their turn came.

"Second Division!" ejaculated Lucy, in mingled relief and disgust, as she came to her own name. "Thank heaven even for that! Just let me take a note of the others. Now for the Honours list, and Mona Maclean!"

The Honours list was all too short, and a few seconds were sufficient to convince them——

"Oh!" burst involuntarily from Lucy's lips, as the truth forced itself upon her.

"Hush!" said Mona hastily, in a low voice. "It is all right. Come along."

She hurried Lucy down the steps, past the post-office, and into Regent Street.

"You know, dear, there are those confounded telegrams to be sent off," said Lucy deprecatingly.

"Yes, yes, I know. There is no hurry. Let me think."

They strolled along in the bright sunshine, but Mona felt as cold as lead. She did not believe that she had failed. There must be some mistake. They had misspelt her name, perhaps, or possibly omitted it by accident. They would correct the mistake to-morrow. It could not be that she had really failed again. After all, was she sure that her name was not there?

"Lucy," she said at last, "do you mind going back with me to the University, and glancing over the lists again?"

"Yes, do. We must have made a mistake. It is simply ridiculous."

But in her heart of hearts she knew that they had not made a mistake.

The little crowd had almost dispersed when they returned, and there was nothing to prevent a quiet and thorough study of the lists.

"It is infamous," said Lucy, "simply infamous! Small credit it is to me to have passed when that is all the examiners know of their work!"

"Nonsense! It's all right. You know I had my weak subject. Come."

"Will you wait here while I send off the telegrams?"

"No, I will come with you."

They passed out of the heat and glare into the dusty little shop, and Mona leaned her elbow wearily on the counter. She had begun to believe it now, but not to realise it in the least. "How horribly I shall be suffering to-morrow!" she thought, with a shiver of dread.

"Weal and woe!" she said, smiling, as she read the telegrams Lucy had scribbled. "Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken and the other left."

"*Don't*," said Lucy, with a little stamp of her foot. For the moment she was suffering more than Mona.

They walked home in silence to the house in Gower Street.

"Come in to tea? No? Well, good-bye, dear. Take care of yourself. My love and duty to your father and mother. Write to me here."

She nodded brightly, opened the door with her latch-key, and entered the cool dark house.

Very slowly she dragged herself up to her pretty sitting-room, and shut the door. She winced as her eye fell on the old familiar sights—Quain, and Foster, and Mitchell Bruce, the Leitz under its glass shade, and the box of what she was pleased to dub 'ivory toys.' Then her eye fell on her own reflection in the draped mirror, and she walked straight up to the white, strong, sensitive face.

"Who cares?" she said defiantly. "Not you nor I! What *does* it matter? *Ay de mi!* What does anything mean? What *is* success or failure after all?"

From which soliloquy you will be able to form a pretty definite idea of my heroine's age.

CHAPTER III.

"ADOLESCENT INSANITY."

"Rather than go through all that strain again," said Mona the next morning, "I would throw up the whole thing and emigrate."

She was leaning back on the pillows, her hair all tumbled into curls after a restless night, her hands playing absently

with the lace on her morning wrapper. "Why doesn't the coffee come?"

As she spoke, the maid came in with a tempting little tray. Mona was a lodger worth having.

"You look ill, miss," said the girl.

"No. Only a headache. I am not going out this morning. Bring the hot water in half an hour."

"What do people do when they emigrate?" she went on, when the maid had gone. "They start off with tin pots and pans, but what do they do when they arrive? I wonder what sort of farmer I should make? There must be plenty of good old yeoman blood in my veins. 'Two men I honour and no third'—but the feminine of digging and delving, I suppose, is baking and mending. Heigh-ho! this can scarcely be checkmate at my time of life, but it looks uncommonly like it."

An hour later she was deep in her accounts; the table before her littered with manuscript books and disjointed scraps of addition and subtraction. The furrow on her brow gradually deepened.

"Shallow water!" she said at last, very slowly, raising her head and folding her arms as she spoke; "shallow water was a euphemism. It seems to me, my dear Lucy, that your friend is on the rocks."

She sat for a long time in silence, and then ran her eye quickly over a pile of unanswered letters. She extracted one, leaned back in her chair, and looked at the envelope critically.

"Not strictly what one would call a gentlewoman's letter," she said; "in fact, a sneering outsider might be tempted to use the word illiterate. Well, what then?"

She took out the enclosure and read it through very carefully. She had tossed it aside thoughtlessly enough when it had found her, a fortnight before, in all the excitement of the examination; but now the utterances of the Delphic oracle could not have been studied with closer attention.

"MY DEAR COUSIN,—Yours safely to hand this morning, and very glad I was to get it. I am afraid you will find us dull company here after London, but we will do our best."

("H'm," said Mona. "That means tea-parties—cookies and shortbread—a flower-show or two in the grounds of the Towers, no doubt,—possibly even a *soirée* in the chapel. Wild excitement!")

"Nobody here knows anything about your meaning to be a doctor, and what we don't know does us no harm. They would think it a queer kind of notion in these parts, as you know I do myself, and keep hoping you will find some nice gentleman——"

("*Gentleman!*" groaned Mona.)

"——who will put the idea out of your head. My niece, who has been living with me for years, has just sailed for America to be married. You are almost the only friend I have now in the country, and I wish you could see your way to staying with me till you get married yourself. It would do no harm to save your own money a bit; your company would be gain enough to me. I must look out for some one at once, and it would make a great difference in my life to have you. Blood's thicker than water, you know."

("That I don't," said Mona. "My dear woman, any chance advertiser in to-day's paper would probably suit you better than I. It is as bad as adopting a foundling.")

"Write me a line when to expect you.

"Your affectionate cousin,

"RACHEL SIMPSON."

Mona folded the letter thoughtfully, and returned it to its envelope. Then she rose from her writing-table, threw herself into a rocking-chair, and clasped her hands behind her head.

Many a perplexing problem had been solved to the rhythm of that pleasant motion, but to-day the physical

exercise was insufficient. She got up impatiently and paced the room. From time to time she stopped at the window, and gazed half absently at the luggage-laden hansoms hurrying to and from the stations.

"Shooting, and fishing, and sketching, and climbing," she thought to herself. "Why am I so out of it all? If there was a corner of the earth to which I really cared to go, I would undertake to raise the money, but there is not a wish in my heart. I scarcely even wish I had passed my examination."

She returned at last to the writing-table, took pen and paper, and wrote hastily without stopping to think. She was in the mood in which people rush at decisions which may make or mar a life.

"My dear Cousin Rachel,—I was very busy and preoccupied when your letter reached me, or it would have been answered before now.

"I don't wonder that you see no need for women doctors —living as you do in a healthy country village, where I suppose no one is ever ill unless from old age, a fever, or a broken leg. Perhaps if you saw something of hospital work here, you would think differently; but we can discuss that question when we meet. Whether I personally am qualified for the life I have chosen, is a quite separate question. About that, no doubt, there might be two unprejudiced opinions. I have not been very successful of late, although I am convinced that I have done good work; and I have been spending more money than I ought to have done. For these reasons, and for others which it is not so easy to put into words, I am anxious to escape for a time from the noise and bustle and excitement of London. I should like to be in some country place where I could think, and read, and live quietly, and if possible be of some little use to somebody. You are kind enough—not knowing what an unamiable, self-centred person I am—to offer me a home with you for an indefinite period; so,

if you really care to purchase 'a pig in a poke,' I will come to you for six months. By the end of that time you will have discovered most of my faults, and will have found some one who would suit you a great deal better. I will pay you whatever you consider the equivalent of my board, and if I can be of use to you in any way I shall be only too glad.

"Believe me always

"Your affectionate cousin,

"MONA MACLEAN."

Lunch was on the table before she had finished writing. She lifted the cover and looked at the nicely cooked dish with irrepressible disgust, then helped herself, and—fell a-dreaming.

"Mona, my dear, this will never do," she said, rousing herself with an effort. "Checkmate or no checkmate, I can't have you fading away like a lovely flower. What is the use of this *Niersteiner* if it does not make you eat? *Hörst du wohl?*" She made a heroic attempt if not a very successful one, and then proceeded to read over critically the letter she had just written.

She shrugged her shoulders as she closed the envelope.

"Adolescent insanity!" she exclaimed cynically. "Well, why not? Some of us are adolescent, I suppose, and most of us are insane."

She put on her hat and strolled down towards Oxford Street to post the letter. It suited her mood to drop it into the letter-box with her own hands, and besides, she was rarely so depressed as not to be amused by the shop-windows. To-day, however, as she wandered aimlessly on, the gay shows in Regent Street fell upon eyes that saw not. "If I had only passed," she said, "how happy I should be!"

She turned wearily homewards, and was met in the hall by the maid.

"If you please, miss, two ladies called while you were out. They were in a carriage, and they left this card."

Mona went up-stairs as she read it.

"Lady Munro" was the name on the card; an address in Gloucester Place, Portman Square, was scrawled in the corner; and on the back in pencil—

"So sorry to miss you. You must dine with us without fail on Friday at eight. No refusal."

A pleased smile crossed Mona's face.

"She is spoiling the story," she said. Then the smile was chased away by a frown.

"If only the story had not spoiled itself!"

And then she bethought herself of the letter she had posted.

CHAPTER IV.

SIR DOUGLAS.

When Friday evening came, Mona took a curious pleasure in making the very most of herself.

She knew, as well as any outsider could have told her, that her present depression and apathy were but the measure of the passionate enthusiasm with which she had lived the life of her choice; and yet it was inevitable that for the time she should look at life wholly on the shadowed side. Past and future seemed alike gloomy and forbidding—"*Grau, grau, gleichgültig grau*"—and the eager, unconscious protest of youth against such a destiny, took the form of a resolution to enjoy to the utmost this glimpse of brightness and colour. She would forget all but the present; new surroundings should find her for the moment a new being.

When she reached Gloucester Place, Lady Munro and her daughter were alone in the drawing-room.

Lady Munro was one of those people who make a marked impress on their material surroundings. The rooms in which

she lived quickly became, as it were, a part of herself, which her friends could not fail to recognise as such.

Eastern rugs and draperies clothed the conventional London sitting-room; luxuriant, tropical-looking plants were grouped in corners, great sensuous roses lolled in Indian bowls, and a few rich quaint lamps cast a mellow glow across the twilight of the room.

"Why, Mona, can it really be you?" Lady Munro rose from her lounge, and kissed her niece affectionately on both cheeks. For a moment Mona could scarcely find words. She was keenly susceptible at all times to the beauty of luxury, and the very atmosphere of this room called up with irresistible force forgotten memories of childhood. The touch of this gracious woman's lips, the sound of her voice, the soft *frou-frou* of her gown, all gave Mona a sense of exquisite physical pleasure. Lady Munro was not, strictly speaking, a beautiful woman; but a subtle grace, a subtle fascination, a subtle perfume were part of her very being. She was worshipped by all the men who knew her, but the most cynical of her husband's friends could not deny that she was no whit less charming in her intercourse with her own sex than she was with them. She was not brilliant; she was not fast; she was simply herself.

"This is my daughter Evelyn," she said; and she laid her hand on a sweet, quiet, overgrown English schoolgirl—one of those curious chrysalis beings whom a few months of Anglo-Indian society transform from a child into a finished woman of the world.

"I expect my husband every moment. He is longing to meet you."

Evelyn slowly raised her blue eyes, looked quietly at her mother for a moment, and let them fall again without the smallest change of expression. In fact, Lady Munro's remark was a graceful modification of the truth. Sir Douglas Munro was nothing if not a man of the world. He knew the points of a wine, and he knew the points of a horse; but above all he flattered himself that he knew the points of a

woman. He had made a study of them all his life, and he believed, perhaps rightly, that he could read them like an open book. "Sweet seventeen" was at a cruel disadvantage in his hands, if indeed he exerted himself to speak to her at all. The genus *Medical Woman* was not as yet included in his collection, but he had heard of it, and had classified it in his own mind as a useful but uninteresting hybrid, which could not strictly be called a woman at all. In the sense, therefore, in which a lukewarm entomologist "longs to meet" the rare but ugly beetle which he believes will complete his cabinet, Sir Douglas Munro was "longing" to make the acquaintance of Mona Maclean.

The new beetle certainly took him by surprise when he came in a minute later.

"Mona!" he replied to his wife's introduction; "Mona Maclean—the doctor?"

Mona laughed as she rose, and took his proffered hand.

"Far from it," she said. "In the vacation I try to forget that I am even the makings of one."

She looked almost handsome as she stood there in the soft light of the room. Lady Munro forgot that her niece was a medical student, and experienced a distinct sense of pride and proprietorship. No ordinary *modiste*, she felt sure, had arranged those folds of soft grey crape, and the dash of glowing crimson geraniums on the shoulder was the touch of an artist.

"Mona is the image of her mother," she said.

"Ye-e-s," said Sir Douglas, availing himself of his wife's relationship to look at Mona very frankly. "She reminds me a good deal of what you were at her age."

"Nonsense!" said Mona hastily. "Remember I am not used to flattery."

"To receiving or to paying it?"

"To neither;" and she turned a look of very honest and almost childlike admiration on her aunt.

Sir Douglas looked pleased, although he himself had long ceased to pay his wife compliments.

"There's a great deal of your father in your face, too," he said. "You have got his mouth. Ah, he *was* a good fellow! I could tell you many a story of our Indian life—a man in a thousand!"

"You could tell me nothing I should more dearly like to hear," said Mona, with eager interest.

"Ah, well—some day, some day."

A native servant announced dinner, and Sir Douglas gave Mona his arm.

"What! another scene from the 'Arabian Nights'?" she said as they entered the dining-room. "It is clear that a very wonderful genius presides over your household."

"You are going to have an Indian dinner, too," said Lady Munro. "Nubboo makes all the *entrées* and soups and sauces. He is worth half-a-dozen English servants."

Mona looked up at the dark bearded face under the voluminous white turban, but she could not tell whether Nubboo had heard the remark. All the philosophy of Buddh might lie behind those sad impenetrable eyes, or he might be thinking merely of the *entrées;* it was impossible to say. If the whole occasion had not seemed to her, as she said, a bit out of the 'Arabian Nights,' she would have thought it sacrilege that a man with such a face should be employed in so trivial an occupation as waiting at table.

"When I look at Nubboo I can almost believe myself a baby again," she said. "He seems like a bit of my dream-world."

The feeblest ghost of a smile flitted across the man's face, as he moved noiselessly from place to place.

"It must be a dream-world," laughed her aunt. "You cannot remember much of that!"

"I don't;" and Mona sighed.

Lady Munro and Mona kept the ball going between them during dinner. Evelyn only spoke now and then, to tone down one of her mother's most piquant and highly coloured remarks; and she did this with a hidden sense of humour

which never rose to the surface in her face. Sir Douglas spoke as much as courtesy absolutely demanded, but no more. The new beetle was evidently perplexing him profoundly.

Lady Munro's feeling for her niece was one of mingled pride, affection, disgust, and fear—disgust for the life-work she had chosen, fear of her supposed "cleverness." Lady Munro despised learned women, but she was not at all willing that they should despise her. She exerted herself to talk well, but even Mona's evident admiration could not put her quite at her ease.

"How is it we have seen so little of you, Mona?" she said, when they had left Sir Douglas to his wine. "Where were you when we were last at home?"

"In Germany, I suppose. I went there for three years after I left school."

"To study music?"

"Both music and painting in a small way."

"You wonderful girl! Then you are a musician?"

"*Gott bewahre!*" burst from Mona involuntarily. "My musical friends thought me a Turner, and my artistic friends thought me a Rubinstein; from which you may gather the truth, that I had no real gift for either."

"So you say! I expect you are an 'Admirable Crichton.'"

"If that be a euphemism for 'Jack-of-all-trades and master of none,' I suppose I am—alas!"

"And does Homer never nod? Do you never amuse yourself like other girls?"

"I am afraid I must not allow you to call me a girl. I believe you have my grandmother's Family Bible. Yes, indeed, Homer nods a great deal more than is consistent with his lofty calling. I am an epicure in frivolling."

"In what?"

"Forgive my school slang! It means that I indulge quite freely enough in concerts, theatres, and in picture-galleries—not to say shop-windows."

"You don't mean to say that *you* care for shop-windows?"

and again Lady Munro's glance rested with satisfaction on Mona's pretty gown, although she was half afraid her niece was laughing at her.

"Oh, don't I? You little know!"

"Pictures, I suppose, and old china and furniture and that sort of thing," said Lady Munro, treading cautiously.

"Yes, I like all those, but I like pretty bonnets too, and tea-gowns and laces and note-paper and — every kind of arrant frivolity and bagatelle. But they must be pretty, you know. I am not caught with absolute chaff."

"You don't care about fashion, you mean."

Mona drew down her brows in deep thought. Clearly she was talking honestly. Then she shook her head with a light laugh.

"I am getting into deep water," she said. "I am afraid I do care about fashion, fashion *quâ* fashion, fashion pure and simple."

"Not if it is ugly?" questioned Evelyn gravely.

"Not if it is ugly, surely; but I question if it often is ugly in the hands of the artists among dressmakers. It is just as unfair to judge of a fashion as it issues from the hands of a mere seamstress, as it is to judge of an air from its rendering on a barrel-organ or a penny trumpet."

Lady Munro laughed. "I shall tell my husband that," she said. "Douglas"—as he entered the room—"you have no idea of the heresies Mona has been confessing. She cares as much about new gowns and bonnets as anybody."

Sir Douglas looked at Mona very gravely. Either he had not heard the remark, or he was striving to adapt it to his mental sketch of her character.

He seated himself on the sofa beside her, and turned towards her as though he meant to exclude his wife and daughter from the conversation.

"Have you seriously taken up the study of medicine?" he asked.

"Now for it!" thought Mona.

She took for granted that he was a decided enemy of the

"movement," and although at the moment she was in little humour for the old battle, she was bound to be true to her colours. So she donned her armour wearily.

"I certainly have," she said quietly.

"And you mean to practise?"

"Assuredly."

The examination and its concomitant sorrows were forgotten. She answered the question as she would have answered it at any time in the last three or four years.

"Are you much interested in the work?"

"Very much," she said warmly.

"I am sure you need scarcely ask that," said Lady Munro, with a kind smile. "One does not undertake that sort of thing *pour s'amuser!*"

"There are other motives," he said, looking severely at his wife. "There is ambition." This was shrewdly said, and Mona's respect for her opponent rose. A fit of coughing had interrupted him.

His wife looked at him anxiously. "I wish you would prescribe for my husband," she said, smiling.

"*Don't!*" ejaculated Sir Douglas fiercely, before the cough gave him breath to speak.

At this moment Nubboo announced a visitor, a cousin of Sir Douglas', and the latter seemed glad of an interruption which allowed him to have Mona entirely to himself.

He shook hands with the new-comer, and then, returning to Mona's side, sat in silence for a few moments as if trying to collect his thoughts.

"The fact is," he broke out impulsively at last, "I am torn asunder on this subject of women doctors—torn asunder. There is a terrible necessity for them—terrible—and yet, what a sacrifice!"

Mona could scarcely believe her ears. This was very different from the direct, brutal attack she had anticipated. Instinctively she laid down her armour, and left herself at his mercy.

"I think you are unusually liberal to admit the necessity," she said, but her sweet earnest face said much more for her than her words.

"*Liberal!*" he said. "What man can live and not admit it? It makes me mad to think how a woman can allow herself to be pulled about by a *man*. Fifty years hence no woman will have the courage to own that it ever happened to her. But the sacrifice is a fearful one. Picture my allowing Evelyn to go through what you are going through!" And his glance rested fondly on his daughter's fair head.

"I agree with you so far," said Mona, "that no woman should undertake such work under the age of twenty-three."

"*Twenty-three!*" he repeated. "It is bad for a *man*, but a man has some virtues which remain untouched by it. A woman loses everything that makes womanhood fair and attractive. You *must* be becoming hard and blunted?"

He looked at her as if demanding an answer.

"I hope not," said Mona quietly, and her eyes met his.

"You *hope* not!" He dashed back her words with all the vehemence of an evangelical preacher who receives them in answer to his all-important question. "You *hope* not! Is that all you can say? You are not sure?"

"It is difficult to judge of one's self," said Mona thoughtfully, turning her face full to his piercing gaze; "and one's own opinion would not be worth having. I believe I am not becoming hardened. I am sure my friends would say I am not."

She felt as if he were reading her inmost soul, and for the moment she was willing that he should. No other argument would be of any weight in such a discussion as this.

He dropped his eyes, half ashamed of his vehemence. "No need to tell me that," he said hurriedly. "I am used to reading women's faces. I have been searching yours all evening for the hard lines that must be there, but there is not a trace that is not perfectly womanly. And yet I

cannot understand it! From the very nature of your work you must revel in scenes of horror."

"*That* I am sure we don't!" said Mona warmly. She would have laughed if they had both been less in earnest. "You don't say that of all the noble nurses who have had to face scenes of horror."

"But you must become blunted, if you are to be of any use."

"I don't think blunted is the word. It is extremely true, as some one says, that pity becomes transformed from an emotion into a motive."

He seemed to be weighing this.

"You dissect?" he said presently.

"Yes."

"Think of that alone! It is human butchery."

"Of course you must know that I do not look upon it in that light."

But a sense of hopelessness came upon her, as she realised how she was handicapped in this discussion. She must either be silent or speak in an unknown tongue. How could she explain to this man the wonder and the beauty of the work that he dismissed in a brutal phrase? How could she talk of that ever-new field for observation, corroboration, and discovery; that unlimited scope for the keen eye, the skilful hand, the thinking brain, the mature judgment? How could she describe those exquisite mechanisms and traceries, those variations of a common type, developing in accordance with fixed law, and yet with a perfectness of adaptation that *a priori* would have seemed like an impossible fairy tale? How cruelly she would be misunderstood if she talked here of the passionate delight of discovery, of the enthusiasm that had often made her forgetful of time and of all other claims? "To be a true anatomist," she thought with glowing face, "one would need to be a mechanician and a scientist, an artist and a philosopher. He who is not something of all these must be content to learn his work as a trade."

Sir Douglas was looking at her intently. As a medical

student she had got beyond his range. As a woman, for the moment, she was beautiful. Such a light is only seen in the eyes of those who can see the ideal in the actual.

But he had not finished his study. He must bring her down to earth again.

"Do you remember your first day in the dissecting-room?"

"Yes," said Mona. She sighed deeply, and the light died out of her eyes.

"A ghastly experience!"

"Yes."

"And yet you say you have not become blunted?"

"I do not think," said Mona, trying hard with a woman's instinct to avoid the least suspicion of dogmatism—"I do not think that one becomes blunted when one ceases to look at the garbage side of a subject. Every subject, I suppose, *has* its garbage side, if one is on the look-out for it; and in anatomy, unfortunately, that is the side that strikes one first, and consequently the only one outsiders ever see. It is difficult to discuss the question with one who is not a doctor" ("nor a scientist," she added inwardly); "but if you had pursued the study, I think you would see that one must, in time, lose sight of all but the wonder and the beauty of it."

There was a long pause.

"When you are qualified," he said at last, "you only mean to attend your own sex?"

"Oh, of course," said Mona earnestly.

He seemed relieved.

"That was why my wife made me angry by suggesting, even in play, that you should prescribe for me. You women are—with or without conscious sacrifice—wading through seas of blood to right a terrible evil that has hitherto been an inevitable one. If you deliberately and gratuitously repeat that evil by extending your services to men, the sacrifice has all been for nothing, and less than nothing."

He spoke with his old vehemence, and then relapsed into silence.

His next remark sounded curiously irrelevant.

"How long do you remain here?"

"In London? I don't quite know. I am going to visit a cousin in ten days or so."

Sir Douglas took advantage of a pause in the conversation between his wife and their visitor.

"Bruce," he said, "let me introduce you to my niece, Miss Maclean."

"That," he continued to his wife, with a movement of his head in Mona's direction, "is a great medical light."

Mona laughed.

"I am sure of it," said Lady Munro, with her irresistible smile. "As for me, I would as soon have a woman doctor as a man."

Sir Douglas threw back his head and clapped his hands, with a harsh laugh.

"Well," he said, "when you come to say that—the skies will fall."

"Douglas, what *do* you mean?" She looked annoyed. At the moment she really believed that she had been an advocate of women doctors all her life. Sir Douglas seated himself on a low chair beside her, and began to play with her embroidery silks.

When Mona rose to go, a little later, Lady Munro took her hand affectionately.

"Mona," she said, "I told you we were starting on Monday morning for a short tour in Norway. My husband and I should be so pleased if you would go with us."

Mona's cheek flushed. "How *very* kind!" she said. "I am so sorry it is impossible."

"Why?" said Sir Douglas quickly. "You don't need to go to your cousin till the end of the month."

Mona's colour deepened. "There is no use in beating about the bush," she said. "The fact is, I am engaged in the interesting occupation of retrenching just now. You know"—as Sir Douglas looked daggers—"I have not the smallest claim on you."

He laughed, and laid his hand on her shoulder.

"Don't be afraid, Mona," he said. "We are not trying to establish a claim on you. The great medical light shall continue her way as heretofore, without let or hindrance. Give us your society for a fortnight, and we shall be only too much your debtors."

"It will make the greatest difference to all of us!" said Lady Munro cordially.

And Evelyn, with the facile friendship of a schoolgirl, slipped her arm caressingly round her cousin's waist.

And so it was arranged.

"Shall Nubboo call you a hansom," said Lady Munro.

"She doesn't want a hansom," said Sir Douglas. "Throw your gown over your arm, and put on a cloak, and I will see you home."

It was a beautiful summer night; the air was soft and pleasant after the burning heat of the day.

It was natural that Sir Douglas should be curious to see the habitat of his new beetle, and after all, he was practically her uncle; but when they reached her door she held out her hand with a frank smile.

"You have been very kind to me," she said. "Good night."

"I am afraid Lucy would say I had not 'stood up' to him enough," she thought. "But all he wanted was to dissect me, and I hope he has done it satisfactorily. What a curious man he is! I wonder if any one ever took quite that view of the subject before? Not at all the view of a Sir Galahad, I fancy"—and she thought of a passage that had puzzled her in *Rhoda Fleming*—"but he was kind to me, and honest with me, and I like him. I must try very hard not to become unconsciously 'blunted' as he calls it."

Her eye fell on a letter from her cousin, and she sat down in her rocking-chair, cast a regretful glance at the withered maidenhairs on her shoulder, and tore open the envelope.

"My dear Cousin,—Your letter has just come in, and

very good news it is. All the world looks brighter since I read it. I will do my best to make you happy, and although you will have plenty of time to yourself, you will be of the greatest use to me. Both in the house and in the shop——"

"Good God!" said Mona; and letting the letter fall, she buried her face in her hands.

CHAPTER V.

"AN AGATE KNIFE-EDGE."

It is doubtful whether Mona had ever received such a shock in the whole course of her life.

She had always been told, and she had gloried in the knowledge, that her father's father was a self-made man; but the very fact that she did thus glory was a proof, perhaps in more ways than one, that the process of "making" had been a very complete one. She vaguely knew, but she did not in the least realise, what people may be before they are "made." She had taken for granted, as she told Lucy, that her cousin Rachel was "not exactly what one would call a lady;" but she had unconsciously pictured to herself a pretty cottage embowered in roses, a simple primitive life, early dinners, occasional afternoon calls, rare tea-parties, and abundant leisure for walking, reading, thinking, and dreaming on the rocks. Her love for the sea, and especially for the wild east coast, amounted almost to a passion, which hitherto she had had but little opportunity of gratifying; and this love, perhaps, had weighed with her as much as anything else, in the decision she had made.

She had talked with pride of the "good old yeoman

blood" in her veins, but principle and dainty nurture shrank alike from the idea of the middleman—the shop.

She did not dream of withdrawing from the rashly concluded bargain. That simple way out of the difficulty never suggested itself to her mind. "After all, could I have done any better?" she said. "Even if Sir Douglas and my aunt took more than a passing interest in me, should I be content to devote my life to them? Nay, verily!" But all her philosophy could not save her from a *mauvais quart d'heure* —nor from a restless wakeful night—after she had read the letter.

And yet the situation appealed irresistibly to her sense of humour.

"If only Lucy were here to enjoy it!" she said. And she found the necessary relief to her feelings in a long letter to her friend.

"I can see you turn pale at the word *shop*," she wrote, "as I confess I did myself; but I suppose your youthful and untrammelled imagination has taken flight at once to Parkins & Gotto or Marshall & Snelgrove. My dear, let me inform you at once that the town contains less than two thousand inhabitants; and now, will you kindly reflect on the number of cubic feet which the Parkins & Gotto and Marshall & Snelgrove of such a place would find ample for the bestowal of their wares. My own impression is, that my sitting-room would afford sufficient accommodation for both, and I am not sure that there would not be room for Fortnum & Mason to boot.

"If I only knew what I am to sell, it would be some relief. Tobacco was my first thought, but the place is not big enough to support a tobacconist. At whisky I draw the line—and yet, on second thoughts, I don't. If it is tobacco or whisky—behold my life-work! But if it is toffee and ginger-bread horses, and those ghastly blue balls—what are they for, by the way?—may the Lord have mercy upon my soul!"

She mentioned her meeting with the Munros, and the projected trip to Norway, and then—

"I hope the grocer duly congratulated you over the counter," she concluded. "I take a fraternal interest in his behaviour now, and with characteristic catholicity I have gone further afield, and have imagined the very words in which the postman delivered his tit-bit of information. I have even pictured the farmers forgetting the price of hay, and the state of the crops, in the all-absorbing topic of the hour.

"Your affectionate friend,

"MONA MACLEAN."

"And now," she said to herself, as she surveyed the alarming array of trunks and packing-cases which the servants had placed in the room,—"now I am in the position commonly described as having my work cut out for me! The valise must do for Norway, that trunk and hat-box for Borrowness, and all the rest must be warehoused at Tilbury's."

The consideration of her wardrobe provided food for some reflection and a good deal of amusement.

"Pity there is no time to write to the *Queen* for information as to outfit desirable for six months in a small shop at Borrowness!" she thought.

Finally, she decided on a plain tailor-made tweed, a dark-coloured silk, a couple of pretty cotton morning-gowns, and a simple evening-dress, "in case of emergency," she said, but she knew in her heart that no such emergency would arise.

"The good folks will think those sweetly simple, and befitting the state of life to which it has pleased Providence to call me," she said. "They would stare a little if they knew what I had paid for them, I fancy. Borrowness '*versteht so was nicht*,' as my dear old Frau used to say of Pauline and the asparagus."

In the midst of her work Sir Douglas and Evelyn came in on some mythical errand. Lady Munro would have come

herself, but she *was* so busy. Sir Douglas was in high spirits. It really was true of him, what Lady Munro had graciously said of all of them, that Mona's going made the greatest difference in the pleasure of the tour. From the point of view of personal companionship he had long since exhausted his wife, and Evelyn was still too crude and insipid to be thought of in that capacity. To his peculiar, and possibly morbid, taste, Mona's society had all the piquancy which was as desirable to his mind as were Nubboo's curries to his jaded Anglo-Indian palate.

It was sad work that packing. Many a bright hope and lofty ambition was buried with the books and instruments in the great wooden cases; and who could tell whether there would be any resurrection? Mona felt that another fortnight of life would bring her to the end of all things. "A world of failure and blighted enthusiasm behind," she said, "a wild waste of vulgarity and mediocrity in front; and here I stand for an instant poised on an 'agate knife-edge' of fashion and luxury and popularity. *Carpe diem!*"

"And I'm sure, miss, if you'll give me what notice you can, I'll do my very best to have the rooms vacant again," said the good-hearted Irish landlady, who kept dropping in at the most inconvenient moments to offer assistance and shed a few tears. "It's little trouble you've given, and many's the time it's done me good to meet your bright face on the stair."

"You may be quite sure that if I am ever in London for any length of time, I shall try very hard to secure my old quarters," said Mona cordially; "but it is impossible to tell what the future may bring;" and she sighed.

If lodgers could be made to order, Mrs O'Connor would fain have had hers a little more communicative. She was thirsting for an explanation of the fine carriage that had driven up to the door on Wednesday afternoon, and of the beautiful lady who had seemed so disappointed to find Miss Maclean out.

When the same equipage disappeared with Mona on Monday morning, and Mrs O'Connor had leisure to reflect on the apparent finality of this departure, in the light of the alternate high spirits and profound depression which had not altogether escaped her observation, she came to the conclusion that Miss Maclean was meditating a good match, but that she did not quite know her own mind.

CHAPTER VI.

THE NÆRODAL.

"Don't talk to me of 'kariols' and 'stolkjaerres,'" said Sir Douglas hotly. "I never got such an infernal shaking in my life."

Mona laughed. "Do you know," she said, "I imagine that 'kariols' and 'stolkjaerres' have done more to make or mar Norway than all its mountains and fjords. They are so picturesque and characteristic, and they make up so neatly into wooden toys and silver ornaments. Scenery and sunsets are all very well, but it is amazing how grown-up children love to carry home a piece of cake from the party, and in this case the piece of cake serves as an excellent advertisement."

"Fill your pockets with cake by all means, but let us have more substantial diet while we are here. You girls may do as you like; for the future, Maud and I travel in a calesch."

They were all sitting on the grassy mounds and hillocks near the edge of the precipice, above the Nærodal at Stalheim.

The air was full of the fragrance of spicy herbs and shrubs, and the ceaseless buzz of insects in the mellow sunshine

could be heard above the distant unvarying roar of the waterfalls.

In front lay the "narrow valley," bounded on either side by a range of barren, precipitous hills, half lost in shadow, half glowing in purple and gold. Some thousand feet below, like a white scar, lay the river, spanned by tiny bridges, over which horses and vehicles crawled like flies. Behind, the pretty, gimcrack hotel raised its insolent little gables in the midst of the great solitude; and beyond that, hills and mountains rose and fell like an endless series of mighty billows.

Lady Munro was leaning back in a hammock-chair, half asleep over her novel; Sir Douglas puffed at his fragrant cigar, and protested intermittently against all the hardships he had been called upon to endure; Evelyn, with the conscientiousness of an intelligent schoolgirl, was sketching the Nærodal; and Mona leaned idly against a hillock, her hands clasped behind her head, her face for the moment a picture of absolute rest and satisfaction.

"Why don't they bring the coffee?" said Lady Munro, stifling a yawn. "Evelyn, do go and enquire about it, do!"

"It has not been served on the verandah yet," said Evelyn, without looking up from her work, "and you know they are not likely to neglect us."

"No, indeed," said Mona. "I can assure you it is a great privilege to poor little insignificant me to travel in such company. I have long known that the god of hotel-keepers all over the world is the hot-tempered, exacting, free-handed Englishman. I used to think it a base superstition, but now that I have all the privileges of a satellite, I see that it is a wise and beneficent worship."

"You pert little minx!" said Sir Douglas, trying to control the twitching at the corners of his mouth.

"And I have also learned," continued Mona unabashed, looking at her aunt, "that a fascinating manner of languid dignity, mingled with a subtle Anglo-Indian imperiousness,

is worth a whole fortune in 'tips.' I mean to cultivate a far-off imitation of it."

"Mona, you are too bad!" Lady Munro had become much attached to her niece, but she never felt quite sure of her even now.

"My own belief is," said Evelyn dreamily, "that the respect with which we are treated is due entirely to Nubboo."

"Well, he does give an air of distinction to the party, I confess," Mona answered. "When he is on the box of the calesch I shall feel that nothing more is required of me."

At this moment a stolid, fair-haired girl, in picturesque Norwegian dress, appeared with a tray of cups and saucers, and Nubboo followed with the coffee. There was a perpetual dispute between them as to who should perform this office. Each considered the other a most officious meddler, and they ended, not very amicably, by sharing the duty between them.

"What a jumble you are making of the world!" laughed Mona, as she watched the retreating figures. "How do you reconcile it with your sense of the fitting to bring together types like those? A century hence there will be no black, no white; humanity will all be uniformly, hideously, commonplacely yellow!"

"God forbid!" ejaculated Sir Douglas, with orthodox social horror of the half-caste. "Who the deuce taught these people to make coffee?"

"I am sure we have reason to know," sighed his wife, "that it is impossible to *teach* people to make coffee."

"*Nascitur non fit?* I suppose so, but it is curious—in a savage nation;" and he drank the coffee slowly and appreciatively, with the air of a professional wine-taster.

Mona rose, put her cup on the rustic table, and looked at Evelyn's painting. "How are you getting on?" she said, laying her hand caressingly on the girl's shoulder.

"If only the shadows would stand still! Mona, you are very lazy. Do come and draw. See, I've two sketch-blocks, and no end of brushes."

"Ah!" said Mona. "Let me really succeed with a *Dies Iræ*, or a Transfiguration, and then I shall think of attacking the Nærodal."

Evelyn raised her blue eyes. "Don't be cutting, please," she said quietly.

"And why not, pray, if it amuses me and does you no harm? In the insolent superiority of youth, must you needs dock one of the few privileges of crabbed age? My dear," she went on, seating herself again, "when I had reached the mature age of twelve I planned a great historic painting, The Death of William II. I took a pillow, tied a string some inches from one end, and round the kingly neck, thus roughly indicated, I fastened my own babyish merino cape, which was to do duty for the regal mantle. I threw my model violently on the floor to make the folds of the cape fall haphazard, and then with infinite pains I proceeded to make them a great deal more haphazard than the fall had done. To tell the truth, the size and cut of the garment were such that I might almost as well have tried to get folds in a collar."

"No great feat," said Sir Douglas ruefully, "if it came from a Norwegian laundry! Well?"

Mona laughed sympathetically. "On the same principle I studiously arranged my head and arms on the dressing-table before the glass to look as if I had fallen from my horse, and I studied the attitude till I flattered myself that I could draw it from memory. But the legs and the nether garments—there lay the rub! Heigh-ho, Evelyn! you need not grudge me my cheap cynicism as a solatium for the loss of the excitement that kept me awake making plans for hours at night, and the passionate eagerness with which I prosecuted my researches by day—between the boards of Collier's 'British History'!"

"But the picture," asked Sir Douglas; "does it survive?"

"Alas, no! Not even as an unfinished fragment. A laburnum-tree and two rose-bushes in the garden represented the New Forest, and I never watched any one leave

the room without making a mental study of Walter Tyrrell disappearing among the trees. But the royal legs were too great a responsibility."

"Why on earth didn't you get some one to lie on the floor as a model?"

Mona's face assumed an expression of horror.

"You don't suppose I spoke to any one of my picture! I was worlds too shy. Is that all you know of the diffidence of genius?"

"I expect it was a very clever picture," said Lady Munro admiringly.

"My dear aunt, I can see it clearly in my mind's eye now, and although 'the past will always win a glory from its being far,' I cannot flatter myself that there is an atom of talent in that picture. There is not a strong line in it. I had plenty of resource, but no facility."

"It must have been a great disappointment to you to leave it unfinished at last."

"Oh dear, no! I believe the difficulty of the legs would have been surmounted in the long-run somehow, but I suddenly discovered that the true secret of happiness lay in novel-writing. I spent the one penny I possessed at the moment on a note-book, and set to work."

"What was the title?" asked Evelyn, who had some thoughts of writing a novel herself.

"'Jack's First Sixpence,'" said Mona solemnly.

"And the plot——?" asked Sir Douglas.

"——narrows itself naturally, as you will see, to what he did with the sixpence. I believe"—Mona's lips quivered, and her eyes brimmed over with laughter, but she still spoke with great solemnity—"that after much reflection he deposited it in the missionary-box. I clearly see, on looking back, that my budding originality found more congenial scope in art than in literature."

"And did that get finished?" asked Evelyn.

"It did—in the long-run; but it had a narrow escape. I had written some twelve pages, when I suddenly thought of

a title for a new story. My next penny went on another note-book, and I wrote on the first page—

'The Bantam Cock and the Speckled Hen:

A Story.

By

Mona Maclean.'

It looked very well, but for the life of me I could get no further. To this day I have never had one idea in my head on the subject of that bantam cock and speckled hen. So I was forced to return to commonplace Jack; and a year later, when I went to school, the second note-book was filled up with four hundred dates, which I duly committed to memory. What a glorious thing education is!"

She sprang to her feet, ashamed of having talked so much, and was glad that the tardy arrival of the post from Vossevangen formed a natural interruption to her reminiscences. The *portier* brought out a bundle of Indian letters and papers for Sir Douglas, and a letter for Mona in Lucy's handwriting. It "brought her down to earth with a run," as she candidly informed the writer a fortnight later, and she put it in her pocket with a frown. It was not pleasant to be reminded of a commonplace, sneering, work-a-day world beyond the hills and the sunshine.

"Nothing for me!" exclaimed Evelyn. "Maria and Annette promised faithfully to answer my letters by return."

"I don't think they've had time even for that," said Mona. "The Norwegians pride themselves on their facilities for posting letters, but you must not expect a reply!"

Sir Douglas went indoors to read and answer his letters in comfort, Evelyn proceeded diligently with her painting, and Mona announced her intention of going for a walk.

"I cannot rest," she said, "till I have explored that path that runs like a belt round the hills to the Jördalsnut. I shall be back in plenty of time for supper."

"My dear Mona!" exclaimed her aunt, "it looks dreadfully dangerous. You must not think of it. A footpath half-way down a precipice!"

"It must be a horse-track," said Mona, "or we should not see it so distinctly from here. Certainly the least I owe you is not to run into any unnecessary danger; and I assure you, you may trust me. Do you see that cottage at the end of the path close to the Jördalsnut? When I get there, I will wave my large silk handkerchief. Perhaps you will see it if you are still here. *Au revoir!*" She kissed her aunt's dainty ringed hand, and set off at a good walking pace.

She had already made enquiry respecting the shortest way to the Jördalsnut, and she found it now without much difficulty. For half a mile or so it lay along the beaten road, and then turned off into the fields. From these, she passed into a straggling copse of stunted trees and tangled undergrowth, and emerged suddenly and unexpectedly on the brink of a deep gorge. Away down below, brawled and tumbled a foaming swollen tributary of the river, and Mona saw, with some uneasiness, that a plank without any kind of handrail did duty for a bridge.

"Now's your chance, my dear girl," she said; "if you mean to keep your head in a case of life and death, or in a big operation—keep it *now!*"

She gave herself a second to make up her mind—not another in which to think better of it—and then walked steadily across.

"After all, there was no danger for anybody one degree removed from an idiot," she said, with characteristic contempt for an achievement the moment it had passed from the region of *posse* into that of *esse*.

But it was with renewed energy that she climbed the opposite side of the gorge and mounted the steep stony path that brought her out on the open hillside. Now that she was actually among them, the mountains towered about her in awful silence. The sky above and the river below seemed alike distant. The sun had gone down, and she stood there

all alone in the midst of barren immensity. She took off her hat, tossed back the hair from her heated forehead, and laughed softly.

But she was only now at the beginning of the walk she had planned, and there was no time to lose. The path was, as she had thought, a horse-track, and the walk involved no danger, so long as one did not too entirely lose sight of one's footing in the grandeur of the surroundings. Once she was almost startled by the sudden appearance of a man a few yards in front of her, a visitor at the hotel, probably, for he lifted his hat as he passed

"Of all the hundreds who are passing through Stalheim to-day," she thought, "only one takes the trouble to come along here, out of the eternal rush of kariols. What *do* they come to Norway for?"

Every step of the walk was keen enjoyment. She had never allowed herself to get out of touch with nature. "The 'man' shall not 'perceive it die away,'" she had said in the confidence of youth. "Nature is jealous, I know, but she shall receive no cause of offence from me. She was my first friend, and she shall be my last."

She reached the tiny homestead she had seen from Stalheim, and she waved her handkerchief for some minutes, looking in vain for an answering signal. She was very near the Jördalsnut now, but to her great disappointment she found herself separated from it by a yawning valley which it was quite impossible to cross. The path by which she had come was continued along the hillside into this valley, turning upon itself almost at right angles.

"It's clear I shall get nowhere near the dear old roundhead to-night," she said, "but I may be able to see at least how the path reaches it ultimately."

She walked on for some time, however, without coming to any turning, and her spirits began to flag. The whole scene had changed within the last half-hour. The air was damp; poor-looking, half-grown trees concealed the view; and the ground was covered with long, dank grass.

"I suppose I must turn," she said regretfully. "I will take five minutes' rest, and then be off home."

She seated herself on a great mossy boulder, and suddenly bethought herself of Lucy's letter. The familiar handwriting and words looked strangely out of place in this dreary solitude.

"My dear Mona,—Perhaps you would like to know what I did when I read your letter. I sat on the floor and *howled!* Not with laughter,—don't flatter yourself that your witticisms had anything to do with it. They only added insult to injury. Don't imagine either that I mean to argue with you. It is impossible to influence you when your decision is *right;* and when it is *wrong*, one might as well reason with a mule. The idea! I told father you would walk through the examination in January and take your final M.B., when I did. It once or twice crossed my mind with horror that you might content yourself with a Scotch 'Triple,' or even a beggarly L.S.A.; but that you would be insane enough to chuck the whole thing, never so much as entered my head. It is too absurd. Because, as you are pleased to say, you have thrown three or four years of your life to the pigs and whistles, is that any reason why you should throw a fifth?

"And have you really the conceit to suppose that you would make a good barmaid—a profession that requires inborn talent and careful cultivation? Can you flirt a little bit, may I ask? Could you flirt if your life depended on it? Would anything ever teach you to flirt? Personally I take the liberty of doubting it. I suppose you think improving conversation and scientific witticisms will do equally well, or better?—will amuse the men, and improve them at the same time? *Gott bewahre!*

"Do you consider yourself even qualified to be a linen-draper's shop-girl? Are you in the habit of submitting to the whims and caprices of every Tom, Dick, and Harry who confers on you the favour of bargaining with you for a good penny's-worth? Is it possible you do not

realise the extent to which you have always been — to use a metaphor of your own—the positively electrified object in the field?—how we have all meekly turned a negative side to you, and have revenged ourselves by being positive to the rest of the world? Can you hope to be a comfort even to your cousin? Do you think she will enjoy being snubbed if she calls things 'stylish' or 'genteel'? Do you imagine that 'Evenings with the Microscope' will fill the place of a comfortable gossip about village nothings and nonentities?

"Oh Mona, my friend, my wonderful, beautiful Mona, don't be an abject idiot! Write to your cousin that you have been a fool, and let us see your dear face in October. How is the School to get along without you?

"In any case, darling, write to me, and that right soon. Why did you not tell me more about the Munros. The idea of dangling such a delicious morsel as Sir Douglas before my eyes for a moment, only to withdraw him again? How could you tantalise me so? You know hot-tempered, military old Anglo-Indians are my *Schwärmerei*, &c., &c., &c."

Mona laughed, but her eyes were full of tears. She was not seriously moved by Lucy's letter but it depressed her sadly, and suggested food for much reflection. She sat for a long time, her head resting on her hand, her eyes fixed absently on the page before her. Suddenly the sharp rap of a raindrop on the paper brought her to a recollection of her surroundings, and she started to her feet in alarm. It had grown strangely dark. She could see the mist gathering even through the trees, and the rain was evidently coming on in earnest.

CHAPTER VII.

A SON OF ANAK.

When she emerged into the comparative light and openness of the Nærodal, she found, as she had feared, that the mist was creeping rapidly down the hillsides. It was raining heavily, and she must soon be enveloped in a thick, wet cloud.

"I am an abject idiot, as you say, Lucy," she said, "but it was mainly your fault this time."

She hurried along in breathless haste, but she was soon obliged to slacken her pace. Although the path was safe enough, it was broken away in some places, and already she could scarcely see a yard in front of her.

"I don't mind the open hillside," she gasped, "but how I am to get across an invisible plank, with an invisible torrent roaring down below, heaven alone knows!"

And indeed she did mind the open hillside very much. In the clear daylight she had fancied herself half-way between earth and sky; now she was standing on a single square yard of stony ground in a universe of nothingness.

"It is simply impossible that I can find my way through that wood," she went on, becoming almost calm from very despair. "It was a pure chance that I took the right path when the sun was shining."

She had serious thoughts of deliberately spending the night on the hillside, and even sat down for a few minutes on a dripping stone; but her clothes were soaked through, and her teeth chattered with cold, so she was forced to go on.

"Shall I shout?" she thought. "No, I never shouted or screamed in my life, and I don't mean to begin now." But she knew well that she would have shouted eagerly enough, if there had been the faintest chance of her being heard. It was useless to shout to the mists and the barren hills.

Then for the first time it occurred to her that her uncle would send out a search-party; but, after the first rush of relief, this seemed the worst fate of all. Anything would be better than all that fuss and disturbance. It would be too humiliating to provide food for days of exaggerated gossip in the hotel, to be constrained with much penitence to curtail or forego her solitary walks. And it might all have been so easily avoided if she had had her wits about her. "Oh Lucy, I *am* an abject idiot!" she groaned.

At this moment she fancied she heard a step on the stones some distance behind her. Yes, there was no doubt of it. Some one was coming. Uncertain whether to be relieved or more alarmed than before, she stood still, her heart beating fast. The steps drew nearer and nearer. It was horrible to feel a presence so close at hand, and to strain her eyes in vain. In another moment a broad, ruddy, reassuring face looked down at her like the sun through the mist, and she drew a long breath of relief.

"Bless my soul!" the owner of the face exclaimed, aghast at finding a young girl in such a dangerous situation, "you don't mean to say you are alone?"

"Yes," laughed Mona. But the laugh was a very uncertain one, and revealed much that she would rather have kept to herself.

"Well, I am glad I have found you," he went on, shaking a shower of water from his dripping straw hat. "I shouldn't like to think my sister was out here alone on a night like this. Won't you take my arm? I'm afraid you are very tired, and it can't be easy to walk with your dress clinging to you so."

Mona's cheek flushed, but she was glad to take his arm. His tall, sturdy, tweeded figure belied the boyish, beardless face, and seemed like a tower of strength.

"You *have* had a soaking," he went on, with a sort of brotherly frankness which it was impossible to resent. "So have I, but knickerbockers adapt themselves better to un-

toward circumstances than your things. Am I walking too fast?"

"Not a bit. I need not tell you that I shall be glad to get home."

They both laughed at the equivocal compliment.

"Were you afraid?" he asked presently.

"Dreadfully," said Mona simply. "In fact," she added after a pause, "I am ashamed now to think how unnerved I allowed myself to get."

"Why—you had some cause. Few men would have strictly enjoyed the situation. How far had you gone?"

"I don't quite know. About a mile round the corner, I think. I was among the trees and did not notice the mist. By the way—did *you* get to the Jördalsnut?"

"No: I left my portmanteau at the inn, and started with that intention; but I went in for a bit of scrambling on this side of the valley, and then the mist drove me home. I am very glad it drove me to your assistance—not but what you would have got on all right without me."

"I can't tell you how glad *I* am. I really don't know what I should have done," and she raised her eyes to his with a frank look of gratitude.

He started, almost imperceptibly. There was a curious charm in that honest un-selfconscious glance, but there was something more than that.

"You are not travelling alone, are you?" he asked, after a minute's silence.

"No, I am with my uncle and aunt. Sir Doug—my uncle usually walks with me,—not that I think a chance accident like this is any argument against my going about alone if I choose."

There was no answer. He was looking at her in an interested way, as if meditating the question profoundly.

"Please don't tell any one you found me *in extremis*," she went on; "it would be too great a disappointment to be obliged to give up my solitary walks."

"How can I tell any one what is not true?" he said,

recovering himself. "I did not find you *in extremis* at all. I did not even know you were frightened till you laughed. You looked at me with such dignified self-assurance when I hove in sight that I was more than half inclined to lift my hat and pass on."

Mona laughed incredulously.

They trudged on for a time in silence. Once she looked up and found his eyes fixed on her face with an expression of amusement. "It is very odd," he said, finding himself caught.

"What is?"

"Oh, I don't know—the whole thing."

He broke into a quiet laugh, and Mona joined in it from sympathy. He was a curious creature this son of Anak, whose broad, glistening face gleamed at her so benevolently through the mist.

"Have you been long at Stalheim?" he asked.

"Only a few days."

"Is the hotel good?"

"Ye-e-s. This part of Norway is in an awkward transition stage between the primitive inn and the cosmopolitan hotel."

"Are there many tourists?"

"Oh yes! They go rushing through by hundreds every day. They stop to smoke a cigar, eat a dinner, or sleep for a night, and then join the mad chase of kariols again. They are noisy, too; my uncle gets quite indignant at the way they clatter about the wooden floors in their heavy boots, and shout their private affairs up-stairs and down-stairs, or from the verandah to the road."

"I suppose he does," and the son of Anak laughed again.

The mist was beginning to clear by slow degrees when they came to the crest of the abrupt descent that led to the torrent.

"I can't tell you how I was dreading this part of the way," said Mona.

"Were you? Well, I must say it is a case where two are

better than one. See, I will go first and hold out my hands behind me."

They got across in safety, and in a wonderfully short time found themselves on the road.

"Don't you find it very dull here in the evening?" he asked.

"No. But I can imagine any one would who was accustomed to being amused."

"You sit on the verandah, I suppose?"

"Not on the one overlooking the Nærodal. There is such a crowd there. We get one of the others to ourselves, and enjoy a cup of coffee, and a chat, or a quiet rubber."

"Now do get off those wet things instantly," he said as they drew near the house, "and promise me that you will have a glass of hot toddy or something equivalent. That's right!"—interrupting her thanks—"don't stand there for a moment. I shall take the liberty of presenting myself on the verandah after supper."

Mona ran up-stairs with a smile, but his last words had caused her some alarm. What sort of reception might he look for on the verandah? Lady Munro was considered extremely "exclusive"; and as for Sir Douglas, he classified the male tourists broadly as "counter-jumpers," and was indignant if they so much as looked at his niece and daughter. If her friend got a chance to speak for himself, nobody could fail to see that he was a gentleman, and in that case all would be well; but Sir Douglas was hasty, and not likely to welcome advances from a complete stranger.

"The fact is, I ought not to have hob-a-nobbed with him so," she said. "I need not have let my gratitude and relief run away with me. It is all my own fault. Yes, Lucy, I *am* an abject idiot!"

"Oh, I am so glad to see you!" cried Evelyn as Mona entered the room the cousins shared; "in another minute I should have told Mother."

"Where is aunt Maud?"

"She came in not long after you left, and has been asleep all the afternoon, so there was no one to tell Father. I

"Let us hope he will give me five minutes' grace on the verandah," she said resignedly; but she had just remarked, by way of introduction, that the mist had almost entirely cleared, and Sir Douglas was in the act of lighting his first cigar, when the door opened, and her friend strode in with an air of infinite assurance.

"Aunt Maud," she began, but her voice was drowned in a general exclamation.

"Why, Sahib!" "Dickinson Sahib! Where on earth did you drop from?" "What a delightful surprise!" "Who would have thought of seeing you here? Sit down and tell us all about it. Oh, I forgot—Mr Dickinson, my niece, Miss Maclean."

"I was sure of it," exclaimed the new-comer, shaking hands cordially with the astonished Mona. "If I had met her in the wilds of Arabia, I could have sworn that she was a relative of Lady Munro's." And then the whole story came out, with modifications.

"Well, I must say," said Mona, when the questioning and explanations were over, "that you have treated me extremely badly."

He laughed like a schoolboy. "I am sure you don't grudge me my very small joke."

"No—especially as it make us quits. Now we can begin a new page."

"I hope it may prove as pleasant as the first."

"Prettily said, Sahib," said Lady Munro. "Now, be sensible and give us an account of your eccentric movements."

"Eccentric!" he said, meditating a far-fetched compliment, but he was a sensible man and he thought better of it. "That's easily done. One of my Scotch visits fell through—a death in the house—so I ran over here for a few days. I thought I should probably run against you,—they say people always do meet in Norway. Of course, I knew you had sailed to Bergen."

"And what is your route now?"

"Is it for you to ask me that, as the filing said to the magnet?"

Sir Douglas went in search of maps and guide-books, and Mr Dickinson took a low chair beside Lady Munro.

"I need not ask if you are enjoying your tour," he said. "You are looking famously."

"Oh yes, I think this primitive world quite charming, and the air is so bracing! You have no idea what a pedestrian I have become. When Mona and my husband go off on breakneck excursions, Evelyn and I walk for hours — the whole day long nearly."

Mona looked up hastily. She had never heard of these wonderful walks; but her eyes met Evelyn's, and her question died on her lips.

"And Sir Douglas?" asked Mr Dickinson.

Lady Munro laughed, a low sweet laugh. "Oh, of course, he always grumbles; he says he has lived on roast leather and boiled flannel ever since we came. But he is enjoying himself immensely. It is a great thing for him to have Mona's company, as indeed it is for all of us. I am afraid she finds us dreadfully stupid. You have no idea what books she reads."

"At the present moment," said Mona gravely, "I am reading *Moths*."

Everybody laughed.

"Then you are meditating a cutting critique," said her aunt.

"I am reading the book simply and entirely for amusement," said Mona. "I am getting a little tired of ormolu and marqueterie, but one can't have everything one wants."

"But you don't really care for Ouida?" said the Sahib seriously.

Mona sighed. "If you force me to be critical," she said, "I do prefer sunlight, moonlight, or even glaring gaslight. Ouida takes one into a dark room, and, through a hole in the shutter, she flashes a brilliant gleam of light that never was on sea or land. But what then? She is a

very clever woman, and she knows how to set about telling a story. One admires her power and *esprit*, one skips her vulgar descriptions, and one lets her morality alone."

Lady Munro laughed rather uneasily. She would not have owned to any man that she read Ouida, and Mona puzzled her. "After all, the child has been so buried in her studies," she thought, "that she knows nothing of the world. She will learn not to say *risqué* things to men, and, fortunately, it is only the Sahib."

Sir Douglas returned, and the conversation resolved itself into a discussion of routes and steamers.

"I will not sleep again at that horrid noisy Voss," he said. "We must lunch and change horses there, and get on to Eide the same night."

"Can you be ready to start at eight?" said the Sahib to Lady Munro.

"Oh dear, yes! I am up every morning hours before that."

Sir Douglas laughed cynically.

"Who is Mr Dickinson?" said Mona, when she and Evelyn had retired to their room.

"Deputy-Commissioner of—I always forget the name of the place."

"Never mind. Boggley Wallah will do equally well for me. And why do they call him Sahib? I thought everybody was a Sahib?"

"His family call him that for a joke, and it has stuck somehow. It was because he was very young when he got some appointment or other."

"He looks a mere boy now."

"I think he is thirty-three."

"I wish you would not tell him that I am a medical student; I don't feel that I have done credit to my cloth. I should not like him to think medical women were muffs."

"Oh, Mona, I do wish you would not be a medical woman, as you call it. Why don't you marry?"

"'Nobody axed me, sir, she said.' At least nobody that I call anybody."

"If you would go out to India, somebody would ask you every week of your life."

"Thanks. Even that is not absolutely my ideal of blessedness."

"But you don't want to be an old maid?"

"That expression is never heard now outside the walls of a ladies' boarding-school," said Mona severely. "Oh, my dear, at the romantic age of seventeen you cannot even imagine how much I prize my liberty; how many plans I have in my head that no married woman could carry out. It seems to me that the unmarried woman is distinctly having her innings just now. She has all the advantages of being a woman, and most of the advantages of being a man. I don't see how it can last. Let her make hay while the sun shines.

'Ergreife die Gelegenheit! Sie kehret niemals wieder.'"

"Well, I know I should be very disappointed, if I thought I should never have little children of my own."

"O Maternity, what crimes are perpetrated in thy name! Mothering is woman's work without a doubt, but she does not need to have children of her own in order to do it. You dear little soul! Never mind me. I wish you as many as you will wish for yourself when the time comes, and a sweet little mother they will have!"

CHAPTER VIII.

BONS CAMARADES.

"Nonsense!"

"Fact, my dear fellow! I knew it before I knew her, or I simply should never have believed it. It's an awful shock to one's theories, don't you know?—one's views of womanliness and all that sort of thing. I have thought about it till I am tired, and I can't make it out; but upon my soul, Dickinson, you may say what you like, the girl's a brick."

"I'm quite sure of that already, and I'm sure she's clever enough for anything."

"Oh—clever, yes! But clever women don't need to—but there! I can't go into all that again. I simply *give the subject up.* Don't mention it to me again."

"But you know I am a staunch believer in women doctors. When my sister was so ill, the doctor at the station said she would be an invalid for life, and a staff surgeon who was passing through said the same. As a last resource I got a woman doctor to come a hundred miles to see her, and she brought Lena round in a few weeks. She knew her business, but—she was very different from Miss Maclean."

"Wasn't she? That's just it! Oh, I know they're a necessary evil. I should like to see a man doctor look at my Evelyn, except for a sore throat or a cut finger! I have always upheld the principle, in spite of the sacrifice involved; but how could I tell that any of my own womankind would take it up? You see, she was left so much to her own resources, poor child! There was no one to warn her of what it all meant. I reproach myself now for not having looked after her more; but how on earth could I know that she was going to turn out anything in particular? Gad! Dickinson, when I think of all that girl must know, it makes me sick—*sick;* but when I am speaking to her—

upon my soul, I don't believe it has done her a bit of harm!"

The entrance of Mona and Evelyn into the sunny breakfast-room interrupted the conversation for a moment, and it was presently resumed in a lighter and more frivolous vein over the trout and the coffee.

"Oh, trout, yes!" said Sir Douglas. "I never said anything against the trout. If it were not for that, we should all be reduced to skin and bone. Evelyn, where *is* your mother?"

It was eight o'clock, and the calesch stood at the door, when Lady Munro appeared, serene and smiling; and then Evelyn and Mona had to hurry away and pack her valise for her.

"You know I've been up for hours," she said, with a charming nod to the Sahib, as she seated herself at the table, "but I began to write some letters——"

"Humph!" said Sir Douglas, and shrugging his shoulders, he abruptly left the room.

When the tardy valise was at last roped on to the calesch, and the *portier* was opening the door, the young Norwegian landlady came up shyly to Lady Munro.

"Will you haf?" she said in her pretty broken English, holding out a large photograph of the hotel, with its staff on the doorstep.

Never had Lady Munro smiled more sweetly.

"Is that really for me? How very kind! I cannot tell you how much I shall prize it as a memento of a charming visit. Why, I can recognise all of you!" and she looked round at the worshipping servants.

A minute later they drove off in state, with Nubboo enthroned on the box in front, and Dickinson Sahib following on in a kariol behind.

It was a glorious summer morning. Not a trace of mist or cloud lingered about the hillsides; the Nærodal was once more asleep in sunshine and shadow.

"Well, I am sure we shall not soon forget Stalheim," said Lady Munro. "It has been quite a new experience."

"Quite," agreed Sir Douglas. "It has been an absolutely new experience to me to see a hard-worked horse go up a hen's ladder to bed, with only a bundle of hay for supper, and never a touch from his groom. It is astonishing what plucky little beasts they are in spite of it."

"Now don't enjoy the scenery too much," said the Sahib, driving up alongside. "You have been over this ground before, and human nature cannot go on enjoying keenly all day long. Save yourselves for the afternoon. The drive from Voss to Eide is one of the finest things in Norway."

And so it proved. For the first few miles after they left Vossevangen, they drove through pine-woods and dripping cliffs, where every tiny ledge had its own tuft of luxuriant mosses; and then suddenly, at full speed, they began the descent to the sea-level.

"How *dreadfully* dangerous!" exclaimed Lady Munro.

"As good as a switchback," laughed Evelyn.

"What engineers those fellows must be!" said Sir Douglas admiringly, as every turn brought them in sight of the two great waterfalls, and their faces were drenched with spray.

"It is like going round and round the inside of a mighty chalice," said Mona.

And so it was; but the sides of the chalice were one living mass of the most glorious green, almost every square yard of which would have made a picture by itself.

When they reached the bottom, the driver suddenly dismounted, and proceeded to occupy himself with a piece of string and the weather-beaten straps that did duty for traces.

"Harness—broke!" he said calmly.

"The deuce it has!" exclaimed Sir Douglas. "I think you might have found that out at the top of the hill. Do you suppose our necks are of no more value than your own? Nubboo, just see that it is all right now."

"How horrible!" and Lady Munro shuddered.

Nubboo delivered a lengthy report in his native language, and Sir Douglas shrugged his shoulders resignedly.

"We must just chance it," he said. "I daresay it will be all right."

"How *horrible!*" repeated Lady Munro.

But they reached Eide without further accident, although rain fell steadily during the last hour of the drive.

It is the pleasant and primitive practice at Eide, especially in rainy weather, for the visitors to assemble in the large entrance-hall and verandah to watch the arrival of new-comers.

"If the show had been got up expressly for their benefit, and they had duly paid for their seats, they could not stare more frankly, could they?" laughed the Sahib, as he helped the ladies out of the calesch. "There is not an atom of concealment about it."

"Great privilege for us, upon my soul, to afford so much entertainment!" growled Sir Douglas.

"Won't you come for a turn in the garden before you go up-stairs?" the Sahib asked Mona, when the question of rooms had been settled. "We have five minutes to spare before supper, and there is a fine view of the fjord."

"But alack! what a change after dear, rugged old Stalheim!" she said, as they strolled down to the water's edge. "This might almost be an Interlaken garden."

"Quite tropical, isn't it? But look at the fjord!"

It spread out before them in a soft, hazy golden light, and the tiny waves broke gently on the steps at their feet.

Mona's face kindled. She did not think it necessary to speak.

"And yet," she said a minute later, "it is a cruel fjord. It is going to take us back to civilisation again." And then she could scarcely repress a laugh. Civilisation, indeed! Civilisation in a small shop at Borrowness!

He looked at her quickly. Did she repent of the life-work she had chosen?

"In the stores of your knowledge," he asked presently, his eyes on the hills, "do you include geology?"

"Among the rags and tags of my information," she re-

plied, "I do not." "Oh, Sir Douglas, Sir Douglas," she thought, "you faithless knight!"

"I seem to have put my foot in it," he thought vaguely. "but I cannot imagine how." And so he proceeded to do it again.

"They have a lot of quaint old silver rings at the hotel," he said, as they turned back, "and other ancient Norwegian curios. I should like your opinion of them. Are you an authority on the subject?"

"Far from it," she said. "But I should like very much to see them, and to compare the things I like with the things I ought to like. Pray," she added, with an expression of almost childlike entreaty, "don't let any one persuade you that I am a learned woman. I wish with all my heart that I were, but I'm not, and I can't bear to feel like a hypocrite."

"I don't think any one will ever take you for *that*," he said, smiling.

"I suppose it must be my own fault," she went on, with curious impulsiveness, not heeding his remark. "I suppose my manner is dogmatic and priggish. But what can I do? When I am interested in a subject, I can't stop to think about my manner."

"If I might venture to advise," he said, "I should certainly say, 'Don't attempt it.'"

The next day they sailed for Odde. The fjord was smooth as glass, and every hamlet and tree on the peaceful hillsides was reflected in the water. It was a day for dreaming rather than for talking, and they scarcely spoke, save when each bay and gorge brought into view a fresh spur of the mighty glacier.

Early in the afternoon they reached Odde, beautiful Odde! —lying close to the edge of the fjord, embraced by the wooded hills, with pretty yachts and steamers at anchor in its bay, and the glacier looking coldly down from the great ice-sea above.

"We might almost be in England again," said Lady Munro, as they sat at lunch in the dining-room of the Hardanger.

"Yes, indeed," said Sir Douglas. "Civilised notions, half-a-dozen people in the place that one knows, two—actually two—shops, and *dinners!* Evelyn, you had better take a kariol and a tiger, and go shopping on the Boulevard!"

"I was just going to ask for your purse," said Evelyn calmly; "there are no end of things that I want to buy."

Finally, they betook themselves to the shops *en famille*, and a scene of reckless expenditure ensued. Sir Douglas heaped presents on "the girls," as he called Mona and Evelyn, and Lady Munro seemed to be in a fair way to buy up the whole shop.

"These old silver things *are* so pretty," she said childishly.

"And, at worst, they will do for bazaars," added Evelyn.

The saleswoman became more and more gracious. She had considerable experience in serving tourists who, with reminiscences of a previous summer in Switzerland or Italy, offered her "a pound for the lot," and her manner had acquired some asperity in consequence; but she quickly adapted herself to the people with whom she had to deal.

Mona watched her with a curious interest and fellow-feeling. "I ought to be picking up hints," she thought, with a smile. "I certainly might have a much worse teacher."

"Let me see. That's eleven and a half kroner," said a showy-looking man, taking a handful of gold and silver from his pocket. "I'll give you ten shillings."

No answer.

"Will you take ten shillings?"

"No, sir," very quietly.

He frowned. "Eleven shillings?"

"No, sir."

"What do you throw off?"

"Not—anything, sir," in slow but very unmistakable English.

He flounced out of the shop, leaving the things lying on the counter.

Not a muscle of the young woman's face changed, as she quietly returned the pretty toys to their place on the shelves.

"*Brava!*" said Mona to herself.

"A penny for your thoughts, Mona dear," said Evelyn's quiet voice a minute later. "Mr Dickinson has asked you twice how you like this old chatelaine. He wants to buy it for his sister."

Mona laughed and blushed.

"My thoughts are worth more than a penny," she said,—"to me at least." In point of fact, she was wondering whether it would be a part of her duty to say "Sir" and "Madam" to her customers at Borrowness.

In the course of the afternoon the Munros met a number of friends and acquaintances, and the next few days passed gaily away in excursions of all kinds. Night after night the party came home, sunburnt and stiff, but not too tired to enjoy a bright discussion across the pleasant dinner-table. There was nothing very profound about these conversations. Everybody had toiled and climbed enough during the day. Now they were content to fly lightly from crag to crag over a towering difficulty, or to cross a yawning problem on a rainbow bridge.

But after all, they were happy, and the world was not waiting in suspense for their conclusions.

Sunday morning came round all too soon, and on Monday the Munros were to sail for Bergen. Mona was sitting alone on the verandah, watching the people coming to church. The fjord lay sparkling in the sunshine, and from every hamlet and homestead along the coast, as far as the eye could reach, boats were setting out for Odde. As they drew in to the pier, the voluminous white sleeves, stiff halo-like caps, and brilliant scarlet bodices, made a pretty foreground of light and colour in the landscape.

But in the midst of her enjoyment Mona drew a long, deep, heartfelt sigh.

A little later Evelyn joined her. "I have been looking for you everywhere, Mona," she said. "Mr Dickinson has set his heart on going to the Buarbrae glacier to-day. The others all went before we came, and I think it would be insane to tire ourselves the last day. Father says he has not got over that 'Skedaddle' waterfall yet. You don't care to go, do you?"

Mona's eyes were still fixed on the fjord.

"Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die," she said half absently. "I will go with all the pleasure in life."

"Don't be profane, Mona. You are the queerest, cleverest girl that ever lived."

Mona laughed. "I don't consider that I am queer," she said; "I have good reason to know that I'm not clever; and all the world can see that I am not a girl. Otherwise, your description is correct. My compliments to the Sahib, and, if it please his Majesty to take me, I shall be only too glad to go."

"No doubt it will please his Majesty. You should hear how he speaks to Mother about you. You will soon be on a par with that wonderful sister of his. I think he talks too much about his sister, don't you?"

"No. He is among friends. I don't suppose he would do it in a scoffing world. Evelyn, dear, there is no use telling you not to grow cynical. We all do in this used-up age Cheap, shallow, cynical talk is the shibboleth of the moment, and if we are at all sensitive, it is a necessary armour. But don't carry it into your immediate circle. In heaven's name, let us live frankly and simply at home, or life will indeed be apples of Sodom."

Evelyn looked rather blank. She did not know very well what all this meant, and still less could she see what it had to do with Mr Dickinson's sister. But she felt rebuked, and the words lingered in her memory.

In five minutes more the Sahib and Mona set off.

"What magnificent training you are in!" he said admiringly, as he watched her lithe young figure mount the hill at his side. "Your walking has improved immensely in the last week."

"Yes; one does get rather flabby towards the end of term, in spite of such specifics as tennis. But I don't think the circumstances of our first meeting were very conducive to a just estimate of my powers."

They both laughed at the recollection.

"What an age ago that seems!" he said.

"I am sorry the time has dragged so heavily."

"Nay. The difficulty is to believe that ten days ago I did not know you. Now turn and look behind."

The village had sunk picturesquely into the perspective of the landscape. Beside them the river surged down over the rocks and boulders to the fjord, and the sound of church bells came through the still summer air.

"This is better than being in church," he said.

"Much;—especially when one understands nothing of what is going on. But I am glad I have seen a Norwegian service. It is so simple and primitive, and besides"—she laughed—"I have a mental picture now of Kjelland's Morten Kruse."

"I do go to church as a rule," he said. "In India I consider it a duty."

Mona raised her eyebrows. "I go to church as a rule, too," she said. "But it never occurred to me to look upon it in the light of a duty."

"Don't you think that in that, as in other things, one has to think of one's neighbours?"

"I can't bear the word 'duty' in such a connection. It seems to me, too, that the Spirit of Praise and Prayer bloweth where it listeth. One cannot command it with mathematical precision at eleven o'clock on Sunday morning. The Spirit of Praise comes when one is alone in a world like this. I think we lose our individuality when there is nothing human

near to remind us of it, and become as much a part of this great throbbing glorying Nature as the trees and the grass are."

"And the Spirit of Prayer?"

Mona smiled.

"The story of that," she said, "is written on each man's white stone."

"And yet, if most people act on that principle," he said, "they are a little apt to lose the Spirit of Praise and Prayer altogether. Don't you think so?"

Mona did not answer the question for a moment. Then she met the eyes that were fixed on her face. "Yes," she said frankly, "I do."

They walked on for a few minutes in silence.

"And may I ask what you do go to church for?" he said at last. "Don't answer if I take a liberty in asking."

"You don't at all; but it is a little difficult to say. I believe I go to church in order to get some one to think beautiful thoughts for me. When one's life is busy with work that takes all one's brain-power, there is little energy left with which to think beautiful thoughts. One loses sight of the ideal in the actual. I go to church in order to keep hold of it. If I were a seamstress I should probably go out among the hills on Sunday morning and think my beautiful thoughts for myself."

"You make it, in fact, a question of the division of labour. We are to buy our beautiful thoughts ready-made as we buy our boots, because a complicated state of society leaves us no time to make them."

"Precisely; and yet we are not exactly to buy them ready-made. I think it is Robertson who says that a thought is of no use to us, however beautiful, unless it is in a sense our own,—unless it makes us feel that we have been groping round it unconsciously, and all but grasping it. We cry 'Eureka!' when a beautiful thought strikes home, and we become aware for the first time that we have been in search of something. The moral of all this is, that our priest or

preacher must be a man with a mind akin to our own, moving on the same plane, but if possible with a wider radius. This granted, his sect and creed are matters of infinitely little moment."

"But it seems to me that books would serve your purpose as well as sermons?"

"They serve the same purpose," she said; "but I am a strong believer in mesmeric influence, in the force of personality. Other things being equal, a voice impresses me much more than a printed page. Oh, I don't place sermons in a unique position by any means, or even sermons and books. It is very much a question of keeping 'a border of pinks round the potato-patch.' All the endless things that open up our horizon might be classed together; they would differ only as to the direction in which they open up the horizon. It is quite true in one sense that I go to church for the same reason that I go to the theatre—to keep myself from getting worldly; but a good sermon—I say a *good* sermon—has a more direct bearing on the ordinary affairs of life. In fact, it helps us to see not only the ideal, but, as I said before, the ideal in the actual."

"I think I see what you mean, although theatres are not commonly supposed to serve the purpose of keeping one unspotted from the world."

"It seems to me that one can get worldly over anything, from ballet-dancing to sweeping a room, if one does not see beyond it. There is another side to the 'trivial round, the common task' question, true and beautiful as Keble's poem is. Worldliness seems to me to be entirely a question of getting into a rut."

"All you say is very fine," he said; "but, with the curious provincialism of a Londoner — seen from the Anglo-Indian point of view—you are assuming that one has an unlimited number of preachers from whom to choose. What would you do if you were thrown back on one poor specimen of the 'fag end of the clergy'?"

Mona raised her eyes in surprise.

"I should never dream of going to church at all," she said, "unless there was something to be gained from the service."

"And suppose you were in India, where the lives of the English do not exactly tend to bear out the teaching of the missionaries?"

"I should remember that it must be very poor teaching which would be borne out by hypocrisy on my part."

"You would not go for the sake of example?"

"Most assuredly not. I don't believe in conscious influence."

They had come in sight of the Sandven-vand, and the little steamer stood at the pier. There were several other passengers on deck, so further conversation was impossible till they reached the other side. Then they made their way through the quaint old village, and up the bank of the river towards the glacier. Already it was in full view. Wooded hills closed in the valley on either side, and right in front of them the outlet was blocked, as it were, by a glowing, dazzling mountain of ice, snow-white under the cloudless blue sky.

"Oh, I *am* so glad we came!" And all the light from sky and glacier seemed reflected in Mona's face.

"I thought so," he said, well pleased. "I was sure it would be worth while."

Presently the view was hidden, as they passed under the trees that overarched the river.

"In fact," he said suddenly, as if the conversation had never been interrupted, "you don't believe in letting your light shine before men?"

"*That* I do!" she answered warmly. "I believe in letting a clear, steady, unvarying light fall alike on the evil and the good. I do not believe in running hysterically round with a farthing dip into every nook and cranny where we think some one may be guided by it."

"You are severe," he said quietly.

"Forgive me!" said Mona. "In truth, it is the meta-

phor that is too heavy for me: Fools and firearms—'the proverb is something musty.' Let me choose a weapon that I can use, and you will see what I mean.

"Let us say that each man's life is a garden, which he is called upon to cultivate to the best of his ability. Which do you think will do it best,—the man who, regardless of how his garden looks from the road, works honestly and systematically, taking each bed in its turn; or the man who constantly says, 'A. will be coming down the highroad today; I must see that the rose-bed is in good condition: or, B. will be looking over the hedge, I must get that turnip-patch weeded,'—and so on?"

It was some time before he answered.

"I think you are a little one-sided, if you will excuse my saying so."

"Please don't talk like that. How could I help being grateful for an honest opinion?—the more unlike my own, the better for me. Was I dogmatic again? Please remember that, whatever I say, I am feeling after the truth all the time."

He looked at her, smiling.

"But such as your metaphor is, let us carry it a little bit farther. Let us suppose that your garden is laid out in a land where the soil is poor and the people are starving. You know of a vegetable which would abundantly repay the trouble of cultivation, and would make all the difference between starvation and comparative comfort; but no one will believe in it. We will suppose that you yourself have ample means of livelihood, and are not dependent on any such thing. Would you not, nevertheless, sacrifice the symmetry of your flower-beds and grow my imaginary vegetable, if only to convince 'A. who comes down the highroad, and B. who looks over the hedge,' that starvation is needless?"

Mona smiled and held out her hand.

"Well said!" she cried cordially. "A good answer, and given with my own clumsy weapon. I admit that I would

try to exercise 'conscious influence' in the very rare cases in which I felt called upon to be a reformer. But I am glad that is not required of me in the matter of church-going."

"And the whole, wide, puzzling subject of Compromise?" he said. "Is there nothing in that?"

Mona's face became very grave. "Yes," she said, "there is a great deal in that—though I believe, as some one says, that we studiously refrain from hurting people in the first instance, only to hurt them doubly and trebly when the time comes—there is a great deal in the puzzling subject of Compromise; but it has not come much into my life. There has been no one to care——"

Suddenly she laughed again and changed the subject abruptly.

"It is so odd," she said, "so natural, so like our humanity, that we should argue like this—you in favour of conscious influence, I against it—and I make not the smallest doubt that your life is incomparably simpler, franker, more straightforward than mine."

"That I do not believe," he said emphatically.

She looked at him with interest.

"I suppose you really don't. I suppose you are quite unconscious of being a moral Antiseptic?"

"A *what?*" he asked with pretended horror. "It doesn't sound very nice."

"Doesn't it? I should think it must be rather nice to make the world sweeter, sounder, wholesomer, simply by being one's self."

"Miss Maclean—you are very kind!"

"I wish I could say the same of you! I call it most unkind to make that conventional remark in response to a simple and candid statement of a fact."

"It was not conventional. I meant it. It is most kind of a man's friends to give expression now and then to the good things they think about him. One almost wonders why they do it so seldom. The world is ready enough to

give him the other side of the question. The truth is—I was thinking how very difficult it would be to formulate a definition of you."

Mona put her fingers in her ears with unaffected alarm.

"Oh, please don't," she said. "That would be a mean revenge indeed. It is one thing to say frankly the thought that is in our mind, and quite another to go afield in search of our opinion of a friend. There is a crude brutality about the latter process."

"True," he said. "And I did not mean to attempt it. In fact, I should not dream of pigeon-holing you."

"You *are* unkind to-day. Did I deny that you were fifty other things besides an Antiseptic? and may not an Antiseptic have fifty other chemical properties even more important than that one? Who talks of *pigeon-holing?*"

"You must have the last word, I see."

"Womanlike!" she said, pretending to sneer.

"Womanlike!" he repeated mischievously.

"And now, pray note that *I* have presented *you* with the last word. Any woman could answer that taunt. Instead, I inquire what that shanty on the hill is?"

"That shanty, as you are pleased to call it, is the hotel and restaurant of the place. Shall we have lunch now, or after we have been on the glacier?"

"Oh, after! I cannot rest until I have felt the solid ice under my feet."

This proved to be no very easy achievement; but after a good deal of climbing, Mona's ambition was realised. Then they scrambled down to watch the water surging out from under the deep blue arches; and at last, tired and dishevelled, they betook themselves to the inn.

"I hope you are as hungry as I am," he said, with the old boyish manner, "and I hope we shall find something we can eat."

The "shanty" was clean and airy, with well-scoured floors, but the remains of lunch on the table certainly did not look very inviting,—a few transparent slices of Gruyère cheese,

which seemed to have been all holes, some uninteresting-looking biscuits, and doubtful sausage.

"Have you coffee and eggs?" asked the Sahib. "Ah—that will do, won't it?"

"Coffee and eggs are food for the gods," said Mona.

"Or would be, if they did not spoil their appetites with nectar and ambrosia," he corrected; and they laughed and talked over the impromptu meal like a couple of children.

"How many ladies are there studying medicine just now?" asked the Sahib as they walked slowly homewards.

"Women? I don't quite know. About a hundred in the country, I should think."

"And what do the—I am afraid I had almost said the stronger sex—say to this infringement of their imagined rights?"

Mona looked at his stalwart, athletic figure.

"Pray don't apologise for calling them the stronger sex to me," she said, laughing. "I am not at all disposed to try my strength against yours. Oh, of course there was immense opposition at first. That is matter of history now. But it would be difficult to exaggerate the kindness and helpfulness of most of the younger men; and a few of the older ones have been heroes all along."

"That is a 'good hearing.' Then do you think it could all have been managed without opposition, by dint of a little waiting?"

"*That* I don't!" she answered warmly. "The first women, who were determined not merely to creep in themselves but to open up the way for others, must have suffered obloquy and persecution from all but the very few, at any time. If the lives of a little band of women—I had almost said if the life of *one* woman—could be blotted out, I wonder how many of us would have the courage to stand where we now do? It is a pretty and a wonderful sight, perhaps, to see a band of young girls treading the uphill path and singing as they go. 'How easy it is,' they say, 'and how sweet we make it with our flowers!' No doubt they do,

and heaven bless them for it! But it has always seemed to me that the bit of eternal work was the making of the road."

She spoke with so much earnestness that the Sahib was almost uneasy.

"That is more than true," he said warmly. "It is the working of a universal principle. You know," he added shyly, "if you *were* going to take to a public life, I wonder you did not think of the platform."

"The *platform!*" Mona laughed merrily. "If you put me on the platform with an audience in front of me, I should do what a fellow-student tells me she did on receipt of my last letter—'sit on the floor and howl'!"

They both laughed. This anti-climax brought them comfortably down to everyday life again, and they talked about pleasant nothings for the rest of the way.

"Look here, Dickinson," said Sir Douglas, when they entered the hotel; "I won't have you walking off with Mona for a whole day together. She is my property. Do you hear?"

"I am sure it was I who discovered her on the hillside."

Mona held up her finger protestingly.

"Oh, I am Sir Douglas's invention, without a doubt," she said, putting her hand affectionately within her uncle's arm; "you only rediscovered me accidentally. What a pity it is that every great invention cannot speak for itself and give honest men their due!"

The Sahib was very silent as he sat in the smoking-room that evening. He held a newspaper before him, for he did not wish to be disturbed; but he was not reading.

In India he was looked upon almost as a woman-hater, so little did he care for the society of the young girls who came out there; and Mona's "cleverness" and culture, her earnest views of life, and the indefinable charm of manner which reminded him of Lady Munro, had all combined to make his short friendship with her a very genuine pleasure. Already he found himself thinking half-a-dozen times a day, "I wonder what Miss Maclean would say about this," or

"I shall ask Miss Maclean her opinion of that;" and yet what a curious girl she was! It was a new experience to him to be told by an attractive young woman that he was a "moral Antiseptic"; and, in short, she puzzled him. Women always are a *terra incognita* to men, as men are to women, as indeed every individual soul is to every other; but it might have been well for both of them if the Sahib could have read Mona at that moment even as well as she read him. He would have seen that she looked upon him precisely as she looked upon the women who were her friends; that it never occurred to her that he was man, and she woman, and that nothing more was required for the enaction of the time-worn drama; that, although she had taken no school-girl vow against matrimony, the idea of it had never seriously occupied her mind, so full was that mind of other thoughts and plans. He would have seen that the excitement and enthusiasm of adolescence had taken with her the form of an earnest determination to live to some good purpose; and that the thousand tastes and fancies, which had grouped themselves around this central determination, were not allowed seriously to usurp its place for a moment.

But he did not see. He could only infer, and guess, and wonder.

CHAPTER IX.

DORIS.

The steamer was fast approaching Newcastle.

They had had some very rough weather, but now the sea was like a mill-pond, and the whole party was sitting on deck under an awning.

"Well, Mona dear," said Lady Munro, "I am sure I don't know how we are to say good-bye to you."

"*Don't!*" entreated Mona. "You make me feel that I must find words in which to thank you, and indeed I can't!"

Her sensitive lips quivered, and Sir Douglas uttered a sympathetic grunt.

"You really must spend a month with us on the Riviera at Christmas," went on her aunt. "We will take no refusal."

"*Do!*" said Evelyn, putting her arm round her cousin's waist.

"Thank you very much," and Mona's eyes looked eloquent thanks; "but it is quite out of the question."

"I have put my hand to the plough," she thought, "and I don't mean to look back. Six months it shall be, at the very least."

"And what is a month," growled Sir Douglas, "when we want her altogether? I am afraid I promised that her incomings and outgoings should be without let or hindrance as heretofore—old fool that I was!—but how could I tell how indispensable she was going to make herself?"

"I *wish* you would not talk so," said Mona. "I have never in all my life been so disgracefully spoilt as during the last fortnight. I should get simply unbearable if I lived with you much longer."

"The fact is," continued Sir Douglas, looking at his wife, "the greatest mistake of our married life has been that Mona did not come to us ten years ago, when your mother died."

"I don't fancy Mona thinks so," said Lady Munro, smiling at her niece.

"No," said Mona, and the slight flush on her cheek showed that her frankness cost her an effort. "It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth. If I had not known hardship sometimes, and loneliness often, I could not have appreciated as I have done the infinite enjoyment of the last fortnight."

"The fact is, you bear the yoke a deal too much," said her uncle. "Bless my soul! you're only a girl yet, and you

can only be young once. And now you are going to mope, mope, mope, over your books."

"You know I am going to my cousin in the first instance."

"Yes—for a few weeks, I suppose! By the way, can't you get out of that? I am sure we want you a great deal more than she does."

"Oh no," said Mona hastily. "I can't get out of that even if I wished to."

"If you were cut out for a common drudge, I should not mind," he went on; "but with your gifts—— Do you know, there is nothing to hinder your being a great social success?"

"Oh, indeed there is!" exclaimed Mona. "You have made me very happy, and I have shown my gratitude by forgetting my own existence, and talking a great deal too much. But when my friends want to show me off, and beg me to talk—with the best will in the world, I seem unable to utter a word."

"No wonder, when you live the life of a hermit. But if you gave your mind to it——"

Mona opened her lips to speak, and then thought better of it. There was no need to say that, at the best, social success seemed a poor thing to give one's mind to; attractive enough, no doubt, so long as it was unattained; but when attained, as the sole result of years of effort, nothing but Dead Sea fruit.

Sir Douglas got up and offered her his arm without speaking. They walked up and down the deck together.

"Where are your cigars?" she said. "I am sure you want one."

"I don't," he said irritably. "I want you." But he allowed her to get one out of his case for him nevertheless.

"And now, Mona," he said more amiably, "I want you to tell me all about your money affairs—what you have got, how it is invested, and who looks after it for you."

"You are very kind," she said gratefully; "but please don't suppose I was thinking of money when I talked of

hardship. I am quite a Crœsus now. I had to be very careful for a year or two, while things were unsettled."

"And why the deuce did not you write to me? What did you suppose you had an uncle for? What is the use of your coming to us now, when you are quite independent and we can do nothing for you?"

Mona pressed his hand affectionately in both of hers.

"The use is problematical from your point of view, I confess, but from mine it is infinite. You have made me fancy myself a girl again."

"And what are you but a girl? But come along, I am to hear all about your money."

And they entered into a long and involved discussion.

The Sahib meanwhile was looking on in a mood as nearly approaching ill-humour as was possible to him. If Lady Munro and Mona had both been available, he might have been in some doubt as to which he should converse with; but Sir Douglas had settled the question by monopolising Mona, and she had become proportionately desirable in his eyes. He persuaded himself that he had fifty things to say to her on this the last day of their companionship, and he considered himself much aggrieved. Moreover, Mona seemed to be submitting to a lecture, and the docile, affectionate smile on her face seemed strangely attractive to the neglected man.

Every moment his irritation increased, and when at last—with Newcastle well in sight—Mona left Sir Douglas and began to talk caressingly to her aunt and Evelyn, the Sahib rose abruptly from his chair and strode away.

Mona did not notice that he had gone. She liked him cordially, but, now that the moment of parting had come, her thoughts were fully occupied with her "own people."

"You will let us know of your safe arrival, won't you?" said Lady Munro. "I suppose you will be too busy to write often during the winter, and I am afraid none of us are very great correspondents; but remember, we tryst you for next summer, if not before."

"You can't possibly get beyond Edinburgh to-night," said Sir Douglas, stopping in front of them and looking at his watch.

"I am afraid not," said Mona. "But I am very anxious to go straight through, if possible."

"I do not know why we should not all have gone north together," he continued, turning to his wife. "Cannot we do it still? Your maid can bring your boxes."

"My *dear* Douglas! Evelyn and I need no end of things before we can start on a round of visits."

He shrugged his shoulders, and threw up his eyes resignedly.

"Mona cannot possibly spend a night in a hotel alone," he said

"You dear old uncle! You must remember I have not had you to take care of me all my life. But I am all right to-night. If I sleep in Edinburgh, it shall be with a friend."

"What friend? Who is she?"

"She is a grade or two below the rank of a duchess, but I think she will satisfy even you. Doris Colquhoun."

He smiled and nodded. On the whole, he was well satisfied to have a few days at his club, even if everybody was out of town.

"Well, I will at least see you safe into the train," he said.

The Sahib had expected that this duty would fall to him, and it was with the least possible shade of injured dignity that he took Mona's proffered hand.

"I shall often think of our pleasant walks," she said, looking up with the frank, bright smile that made her face beautiful. But he tried in vain to find a suitable answer, and merely bowed over her hand in silence.

"Now remember, my dear girl," said Sir Douglas, as he passed the last of a series of periodicals through the window of the railway carriage, "if you want anything whatever, write to me, or, better still, come. You do not need even to wire unless you want me to meet you at the station. Just get into the first train and walk into our quarters as

if they belonged to you. We are rolling stones, but, wherever we are, you will always find a home."

Mona did not answer. Her eyes were brimming over with tears.

The train glided out of the station, and Sir Douglas watched it till it was out of sight. Then he swore roundly at a small newsboy who was somewhat persistent in the offer of his wares, and walked back to the hotel in an execrable temper towards the world in general, and towards his wife and daughter in particular.

Mona was alone in the carriage, but she did not allow herself for one moment the luxury of dwelling on the life she had left behind. She dashed away her tears, and brought all her power of concentration to bear on the heap of magazines at her side. But it was hard work. Visions of sunlight dancing on the rippling fjord, of waterfalls plunging from crag to crag, of mountains looming in solemn stillness, of deep blue columns supporting a sea of ice,—all these lingered on the retina of her mind, as the physical image persists after the eye is shut.

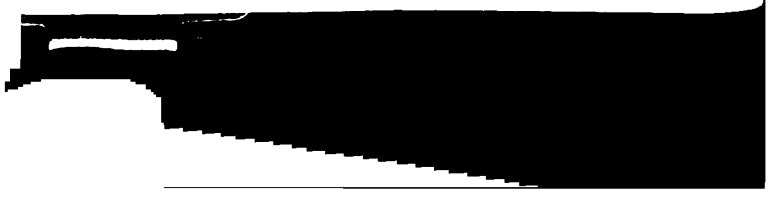
And with them came the faces—of which she *must not* allow herself to think.

Never, since she was a mere girl, had Mona known any lack of friends,—friends true and devoted; but, in spite of moments of curious impulsiveness, a proud reserve, which was half sensitiveness, had always kept even the irrepressible Lucy more or less at a distance. None of her friends had ever presumed to lay claim to any proprietorship in her, as Sir Douglas now did; and perhaps because it was something so new and strange, his blunt kindness was more welcome than the refinement of tact to her sensitive nature.

It was growing dark when the train drew in to the Waverley Station.

"I want to go to Borrowness," said Mona hastily. "Am I in time for the train?"

"Borrowness," repeated the porter meditatively, for the



place was not one of European celebrity. "Well, ma'am, it's touch and go. If you have no luggage you might manage it."

"You will do nothing of the kind," said a quiet voice, and a neatly gloved hand was slipped into Mona's arm. "I never heard anything more absurd."

"Oh, Doris!" exclaimed Mona. "Why did you come? I told you I could only come to you if I missed the last train."

"Was not that the more reason why I should come here for a glimpse of you? I don't get the chance so often. But if you think you are going on with that tired face, and without any dinner, you are much mistaken. Mona, I am surprised—*you* of all people!"

"If you only knew it," said Mona resignedly, "you are very unkind."

"No, I am not. I will observe your own conditions, and argue about nothing. Your will shall be law; I shall not even refer to your last letter unless you do. If you tell me that you are going to fly to the moon from the top of the Scott Monument, I shall merely wish you a pleasant journey. And indeed, dear, I am quite sure your train had gone."

"Well, let me telegraph to my cousin," said Mona, with a sigh.

Doris Colquhoun was not a little surprised at her easy victory, but in truth her friend was too worn out to argue.

"My own ponies shall take you out," said Doris. "They are something new since you were here, and they are such beauties. Do not laugh when you see my groom. Father hunted him out for me. He is about the size of a pepper-pot."

With a light practised hand she took the reins, the "pepper-pot" touched his hat with infinite solemnity, and they bowled away through the town and out into the suburbs.

"Your pepper-pot is a work of art, without doubt," said

Mona, "but I fear he would not be of much use in case of an accident."

"So Father said. But the ponies are very safe, and I don't know what fear is when I am driving. Father is well content to gratify all my whims, so long as I hold my peace about the one that is more than a whim."

Mona did not answer. Just then they entered the avenue of a brightly lighted house; and, with a magnificent sweep, Doris brought the ponies to a standstill in front of the steps.

Mona knew that here she was a very welcome guest, and when she found herself in the familiar dining-room, with the wood-fire crackling in the grate, and father and daughter quietly and unaffectedly enjoying her society, she felt cheered and comforted in spite of herself.

Mr Colquhoun was a shrewd, kind-hearted Scotch solicitor, or, to be more exact, a Writer to the Signet. He was a man of much weight in his own profession, and, in addition to that, he dabbled in art, and firmly believed himself to be a brilliant scientist *manqué*. He was a man of a hundred little vanities, but his genuine goodness of heart would have atoned for many more grievous sins. His gentle, strong-willed daughter was the pride of his life. Only once, as she told Mona, had she made a request that he refused to grant, and in her devotion to him she well-nigh forgave him even that.

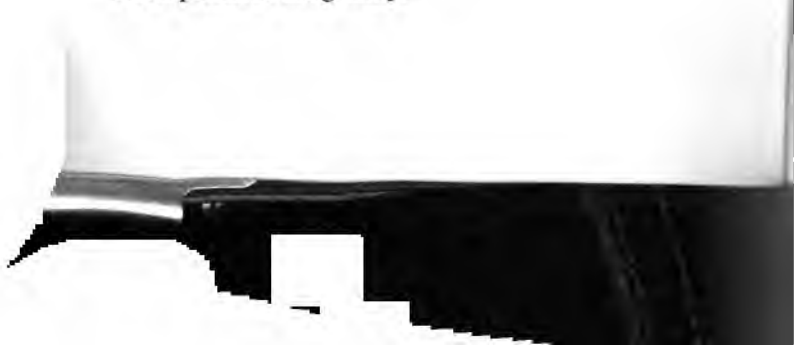
"Miss Maclean looks as if she would be the better of some sparkling wine," said Mr Colquhoun, and he gave an order to the footman.

Mona smiled and drew a long breath.

"What a relief it is to be with people who know one's little weaknesses!" she said.

"What a relief it is to be with people who know one wine from another!" he replied. "Now Doris drinks my Rœderer dutifully, but in her heart she prefers ginger-pop!"

Doris protested indignantly.



"Now don't pretend that you are a wholesome animal," said her father, looking at her with infinite pride. "You like horses and dogs, that is the one human thing about you. By the way, did you make any sketches in Norway, Miss Maclean?"

"Very few. Norway was too big for me. I did some pretentious *genrebilder* of women in their native dress, and a hut with a goat browsing at the foot of a tree that grew on the roof."

"Both goat and tree being on the roof?"

"Both goat and tree being on the roof. The tree is a very common feature in that situation; the goat was somewhat exceptional."

"So I should think," said Doris. "I should like to see that sketch."

"Oh, when you want to turn an honest penny," said Mr Colquhoun, "I will give you fifty pounds for your sketch-book any day."

"Indeed I am sorely in want of fifty pounds at the present moment," laughed Mona, "and, regarded as a work of art, you might have the book for sixpence. But there is a sort of indecency in selling one's diary."

"It is not as a work of art that I want it," he said candidly, "though there is something of that in it too. It is like your father's college note-books." He laughed at the recollection. "You have a knack of knowing the right thing to sketch, which is rare among men, and unique among women."

"Thank you very much, but I am afraid I never appreciate a compliment at the expense of my sex."

"Then you may accept this one with an easy mind," said Doris. "The hit is not at the sex, but at my pine-forests and waterfalls."

"Oh, pray do not let us get on the subject of Doris's sex," said Mr Colquhoun. "That is our one bone of contention."

"One of a very few," corrected Doris.

"I think they all reduce themselves to that."

"Perhaps," she answered gravely.

"And now I want to know how long you can stay with us, Miss Maclean. You must stay for lunch to-morrow, whatever happens. Some cronies of mine—scientific cronies, you know—are coming to look at a wonderful microscope I have been buying. It cost a pretty penny, I assure you. Professor Murray calls it the hundred-ton gun. We should be glad of the opinion of a lady fresh from one of the greatest physiological laboratories in the world."

A courteous refusal was on Mona's lips, but the description of the microscope sounded suspicious. She had had some experience of Mr Colquhoun's method of purchasing scientific articles, and guessed that he had probably given fifty pounds for a cumbrous antiquated instrument, when he might have got a simpler, more efficient one for ten. She was determined that the "cronies" should not laugh at the simple-hearted old man if she could help it; and if the opinion of a "lady fresh from one of the greatest physiological laboratories in the world" carried any weight, surely even a little perjury would be excusable in such a case.

"I will stay with a great deal of pleasure," she said; "but, whatever happens, I must catch the afternoon train."

When the evening was at an end, the two girls went together to Mona's room, and for a time they gossiped about all sorts of trifles.

"Well, I see you are very tired," said Doris at length. "Good night."

Mona did not answer.

"Are you sure you have got everything you want? Let me put that arm-chair under the gas. That's right. Good night."

Still there was no answer.

"Have you fallen asleep already, Mona, or do you not mean to say good night?"

"Oh, you old humbug!" said Mona suddenly, pushing an

arm-chair to the other side of the hearth, and putting her friend unceremoniously into it. "Fire away, in heaven's name! Let me hear all you have to say. Now that I have come, I suppose we must thrash the whole thing out. I withdraw all my conditions. Let us have it out and get it over!"

Doris was almost startled at her friend's vehemence.

"Well, of course, you know, Mona," she said hesitatingly, "it was a great disappointment to me."

"My failure? Naturally. I did not find it exactly amusing myself."

"I don't mean that. I do not care a straw about the failure, except in so far as it delays the moment when you can begin to practise. That was the fortune of war. But I do think you are doing a very wrong thing now."

"In what way?"

"Burying your wonderful powers in the petty life of a village."

"Look here, Doris. I mean to give you a fair hearing, though it is too late to change my plans, even if I wished to, which I don't; but suppose we drop my 'wonderful powers'? I fancy that theory is played out."

"All the examiners in the world could not change my opinion on that score. But we will not discuss the point. Taking you as you stand——"

"Five feet five in my stockings——"

"Please do not be frivolous. Taking you as you stand—a woman of education, culture, and refinement——"

"Youth, beauty, and boundless wealth—go on! Word-painting is cheap."

"I thought you were going to give me a fair hearing?"

"So I will, dear. Forgive me!"

"It used to be a favourite theory of yours that 'every man truly lives so long as he acts himself, or in any way makes good the faculties of himself.'"

"So it is still, now that you remind me of it. *Après?*"

"Oh, Mona, you know all I would say. *Are* you making

good the faculties of yourself? With the most glorious life-work in the world opening before you—work that I would give all I possess to be allowed to share—you deliberately turn aside and waste six precious months among people who do not understand you, and who won't appreciate you one bit."

"I admire the expression 'opening before me,' when the examiners have twice slammed the door in my face. But, as you say, we won't discuss that. You talk as if I were going on a mission to the Hottentots. I am only going to my own people. I do not suppose I am any more superior to my cousin Rachel than the Munros are superior to me."

"Nonsense!"

"At least you will admit that she is my blood-relation. You can't deny that claim."

"I can't deny the relationship, distant though it is, but I do distinctly deny the claim. You know, Mona, we all have what are called 'poor relations.'"

"I suppose many of us have," said Mona meditatively, after a pause. "You will scarcely believe it, but for the last three weeks I have been fancying that my position is unique."

"Of course it is not. We are all in the same boat, more or less. My brother Frank says that, after mature consideration on the subject of so-called poor relations, he has come to the conclusion that, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, it is better to cut the connection at once and altogether."

Mona raised her eyebrows. "Doris Colquhoun quotes that?"

The colour rose to Doris's face, but she went on—

"Not because of their poverty. I do not need to tell you that. There are people who earn thirty pounds a year by the sweat of their brow whom one is proud to have at one's table. It is because they have different ideas, speak a different language, live in a different world. What can one do at the best? Frank says,—Spend a week in the country with them once a year or so, and invite them to spend a fortnight in town. What is the result? They feel the difference

between themselves and you, they don't like it, and they call you 'snob.' Suppose you ignore them altogether? The net result is the same. They call you 'snob.' The question is, Is it worth all the trouble and friction?"

"Doris, Doris," said Mona, "that is the sheerest casuistry. You know no power on earth would tempt you to cut your own poor relations."

"I don't know. The women all happen to be particularly nice. I should not break my heart if I thought I should never see some of the men again."

"All women are particularly nice, according to you; no doubt my cousin Rachel would be included in the number. No, no; tell all that to the marines! I know you too well. And pray don't preach such dangerous doctrine. It would be precisely the people who have risen above their relatives only in the vulgar externals of life who would be most ready to take advantage of it."

"Well, I confess that I always argue the matter with Frank. Personally, I don't see why one cannot be happy and cordial when one meets one's relations, without sacrificing one's self to them as you are doing."

"I don't know that I am sacrificing myself. Perhaps," she added suddenly with a curious smile, "I shall acquire at Borrowness some personal experience in the 'wide, puzzling subject of compromise.'"

"Compromise!" repeated Doris. "Please don't go out of your way for that. The magnificent thing about your life is that there is no occasion for compromise in it. That duty is reserved for people with benighted old fathers. Borrowness is somewhere near St Rules, is it not?"

"Yes," said Mona. "There is only the breadth of the county between them."

"I know some very nice people there. I shall be proud to give you an introduction if you like."

"No, no, no, dear," said Mona quickly. "My friends must be my cousin's friends. Thank you very much all the same."

"But, Mona, at the end of this miserable six months you will go on, won't you?"

Mona frowned. "I have not the vaguest idea what I shall do at the end of the six months," she said.

"You are taking your books with you?"

"Some old classics and German books, nothing more."

"No medical books?"

"Not one."

Doris sighed deeply.

"Don't be so unhappy, dear. I wish with all my heart you could be a doctor yourself."

"Oh, don't talk of that. It is no use. My father never will give his consent. But you know, dear, I am studying by proxy. I am living in your life. You must not fail me."

"You talk as if suffering humanity could scarcely make shift to get along without me."

"And that is what I think, in a sense. Oh, Mona"—she drew a long breath, and her face crimsoned—"it is so difficult to talk of it even to you. A young girl in my Bible-class went into the Infirmary a few weeks ago—only one case among many—and you should have heard what she told me! Of course I know it was only routine treatment. It would have been the same in any hospital; but that does not make it any better. She said she would rather die than go there again. No fate could have been worse."

"Dear Doris! don't you think I know it all? But you must not say no fate could have been worse. The worst fate is moral wrong, and there is no moral wrong where our will is not concerned."

"Wrong!" repeated Doris scornfully. "Moral wrong! Is it nothing then for a girl to lose her *bloom?*" Her face was burning, and her breath came fast. "Young men," she said, scarcely above a whisper, "and all those students—mere boys! It drives me mad!"

Mona rose and kissed her.

"Dearest," she said, "you are the *preux chevalier* of your

sex, and I love you for it with all my heart. I feel the force of what you say, though one learns in time to be silent, and not even to think of it more than need be. But indeed, you make yourself more unhappy than you should. Some of the young men of whom you speak so scornfully are truly scientific, and many of them have infinite kindness of heart."

"Don't let us talk of it. I cannot bear it. But oh, Mona, go on with your work—*go on!*" She kissed her friend almost passionately and left the room.

"There goes," thought Mona, "a woman with a pure passion for an abstract cause—a woman whose shoe-latchets I am not worthy to unloose."

CHAPTER X.

BORROWNESS.

The next afternoon the grey ponies trotted Mona down to Granton.

It was strange to find herself on the deck of a steamer once more; the same experience as that of yesterday, and yet how different! Yesterday she had been the centre of her little circle—admired, flattered, indulged by every one; to-day she was nothing and nobody—a young woman travelling alone. And yesterday, she kept assuring herself, was the anomaly, the exception; to-day was in the ordinary course of things—a fair average sample of life.

It would have been strange if her thoughts had been very bright ones, and a heavy ground-swell on the Forth did not tend to make them any brighter.

"It's a cross-water, ye ken," an old countryman was ex-

plaining to a friend. "They say ye might cross the Atlantic, an' no' get onything waur."

The wind was chill and cutting, and it carried with it an easterly haar, that seemed to penetrate to Mona's very marrow. She was thankful when they reached Burntisland, and she found herself ensconced in a dirty, uncomfortable third-class carriage.

"If Borrowness is your destination," Mr Colquhoun had said, "it is not a question of getting there sooner or later; it is a question of never getting there at all;" and so Mona began to think, as the train drew up for an indefinite period at every little station. And yet she was not anxious to hasten her arrival. The journey from Edinburgh to Borrowness was short and simple, compared with that which her mind had to make from the life behind to the life before.

"I have no right to enter upon it in the spirit of a martyr," she said to herself, "even if that would make it any easier. For better or worse it is all my own doing. And I will not dream the time away in prospects and memories. I will take up each day with both hands, and live it with all my might."

The twilight was beginning to gather when at length the guard shouted "Borrowness!" and Mona sprang to her feet and looked out.

It was a quiet, dreary, insignificant wayside station. A few men were lounging about—fisher-folk chiefly—and one woman.

No, that could not be her cousin Rachel.

During her life in London, Mona had often met an elderly lady whose dress was sufficiently eccentric to attract attention even in "blessed Bloomsbury." A short wincey skirt, a severely uncompromising cloth jacket, and a black mushroom hat, had formed a startling contrast to the frivolities in vogue; and, by some curious freak of fancy, a mental picture of this quaint old lady had always flashed into Mona's mind when she thought of her cousin.

But the woman on the platform was not like that. Her face was ruddy and good-natured, and her dress was a hideous caricature of the fashion of the year before. Every picturesque puff and characteristic excrescence was burlesqued to the last point compatible with recognition. Mona might have met fifty such women in the street, and never have noticed their attire; but the hang of that skirt, the showiness of that bonnet, the general want of cut about every garment, as seen in that first momentary glance, were burnt into her recollection for a lifetime.

"No doubt, the woman I used to meet in London was a duchess," she thought a little bitterly, "but this *cannot be* my cousin Rachel."

She gave an order to the porter, alighted from the carriage, and waited—she scarcely knew for what. She was the only young woman who got out of the train there; so if Rachel Simpson were anywhere in sight, she must soon identify her cousin by a process of exclusion.

And so she did.

But she did it very slowly and deliberately, for Mona was looking rather impressive and alarming in her neat travelling dress, not at all unlike some of the young ladies who came to stay at the Towers.

The train puffed away out of the station, and then the little woman came up with a curious, coy smile on her ruddy face, her head a little on one side, and an ill-gloved hand extended. Mona learned afterwards that this was her cousin's best company manner.

"Miss Maclean?" she said half shyly, half familiarly.

"Yes; I am Mona Maclean. I suppose you are my cousin Rachel?"

They kissed each other, and then there was an awkward silence.

Rachel Simpson was thinking involuntarily, with some satisfaction, that she had seen Mona in a third-class carriage. She herself usually travelled second, and the knowledge of this gave her a grateful and much-needed sense of superior-

ity, as regarded that one particular. She wondered vaguely whether Mona would object to having been seen under such disadvantageous circumstances.

"I suppose my luggage arrived about a fortnight ago?" said Mona, forcing herself to speak heartily. "You were kind enough to say you would give it house-room. What shall I do about this little valise?"

"Oh, the man will bring it to-night. Bill," she said familiarly to the rough-looking porter, "mind and bring that little trunk when ye gang hame."

"Ay," said the man, without touching his cap.

Rachel Simpson was one of the many lower middle-class people in Scotland who talk fairly good English to their equals and superiors, but who, in addressing their inferiors, relapse at once into the vernacular. Mona greatly admired the pure native Scotch, and had looked forward to hearing it spoken; but her cousin's tone and accent, as she addressed this man, jarred on her almost unbearably. Mona was striving hard, too, to blot out a mental picture of Lady Munro, as she stood on the platform at Newcastle, giving an order with queenly graciousness to the obsequious porter.

The two cousins walked home together. The road was very wet with recent rain, and they had to pick their steps in a way that was not conducive to conversation; but they talked eagerly about the weather, the crops, the crossing to Burntisland, and everything else that was most uninteresting. Mona had never mentioned the Munros nor her visit to Norway.

In about five minutes they reached the house, and indeed it was not such a bad little house after all, opening, as it did, on a tiny, well-kept garden. The two windows on the ground-floor had of course been sacrificed to the exigencies of the "shop"; and as they went in, Mona caught a glimpse of some extraordinary hats and bonnets in one window, and of dusty stationery and sundry small wares in the other.

"Marshall & Snelgrove and Parkins & Gotto," she said to herself judicially, "and I suppose Fortnum & Mason, are

represented by those two wooden boxes of sweetmeats beside the blotting-books."

As they opened the glass door, the automatic shop-bell rang sharply, and an untidy girl looked out from the kitchen.

"It's you," she said briefly, and disappeared again.

Rachel Simpson would never have dreamt of giving a domestic order in the hearing of a visitor, so she went into the kitchen, and a whispered conversation took place while Mona waited in the passage. The old-fashioned clock ticked loudly, and the air was close and redolent of rose-leaves and mustiness. Evidently open windows were the exception here, not the rule. The house seemed curiously far away from the beach, too, considering how small the town was.

"If I can only catch a glimpse of the sea from my bedroom window," thought Mona, "I shall be happy in a garret."

But it was no garret to which her cousin presently conducted her, nor, alas! did it command a view of the sea. It was a fair-sized room above the kitchen—a room filled up with ugly, old-fashioned furniture—and its window overlooked a wide prospect of cabbage-beds.

"Just come into the front parlour when you get off your things," said Rachel, "and we'll have a cup of tea."

"Thank you," said Mona pleasantly, and she was left alone.

She seated herself absently on a chair, and then sprang suddenly to her feet again.

"Well, you don't suppose you are going to take stock *now*," she said to herself savagely. "Wash your hands, and be quick about it!"

She took the liberty of opening the window first, however. The upper sash declined to move at all, and the lower one slipped down again as often as she raised it. In vain she looked about the room for something to support it.

"Stay open you shall," she said, "if I put my own head

underneath! but I will resort to the Family Bible first," and her eye rested on the substantial volume that surmounted the chest of drawers.

Finally, she rolled her travelling cloak into a tight bundle, and propped up the sash with that.

"A little rain will do you no harm," she said, "and a little air will do this musty hole a vast deal of good."

She looked about for hot water, but there was none, so with a shiver she washed in cold. Then after a glance at the distorting looking-glass, to make sure that her hair was smooth and her expression tolerably amiable, she betook herself to the front parlour.

There was no fire in the grate. There never was a fire in that grate while the white curtains were up, from May to October. Rachel often indulged in the luxury of sitting by the kitchen fire when she was alone on a chilly evening, and had Mona known this she would thankfully have done the same; but Rachel's "manners" were her strong point, and she would have been horrified at the idea of suggesting such a thing to a comparative stranger. When Mona had really settled down, she could afford to be comfortable again, to use the old brown teapot, put away the plated spoons, and keep her Sunday bonnet for Sunday.

In truth the teapot on the table was a wonderful thing, and Rachel glowed with pride as Mona's eye returned to it incessantly; but Mona was only thinking vaguely that she had never before seen one single object—and that not a very big one—which so absolutely succeeded in setting at defiance every canon of common decency in art.

But all at once she thought of Rachel's affectionate letters, and her heart smote her. This woman, with her shop and all her ugly surroundings, her kind heart and her vulgar formalities, seemed to Mona so infinitely pathetic that, tired and overstrained as she was, she bit her lip to keep back a rush of tears.

"Do you know, dear," she said warmly, "it is very kind of you to have me here."

"Oh, I'm only too glad to have you, if you can make yourself happy."

"No fear of that. Give me a day or two to settle down, and I shall be as happy as a king."

"Yes, it does just take a while to get used to new ways and new people; but blood is thicker than water, I say. My niece, now, had settled down wonderfully. She knew all my ways, and we were so suited to each other. She was a great hand at the millinery, too; I suppose that's not much in your line?"

Mona laughed. "I was going to say, like the Irishman, that I did not know, because I had never tried," she said; "but I do trim my own summer hats. I should enjoy it immensely." "And it will go hard with me," she added to herself, "but I shall eclipse those productions in the window."

"I am afraid," said Rachel uneasily, "we could not sell plain things like you had on. It was very nice and useful and that, of course, but they are all for the feathers and flowers here."

"Oh, I should not attempt a hat like mine. It takes genius to do a really simple thing, don't you think so?"

Rachel laughed, uncertain whether to take the remark in jest or earnest. "Well, you know," she said doubtfully, "it is easier to cover a hat up like."

"Very much," agreed Mona.

"And now you must make a good tea, for I am sure you are hungry after the journey. That's ham and eggs in front of you, and this is hot buttered toast,—only plain food, you see. I have made your tea nice and strong; it will do you more good."

"Farewell, sleep!" thought Mona, as she surveyed the prospect before her; and it occurred to her that the sound of champagne, creaming into a shallow glass, was one of the most delightful things on earth. She blushed violently when her cousin said a moment later—

"I suppose you are blue-ribbon? Everybody nearly is

now-a-days. It is wonderful how many of the gentry have stopped having wine on their tables. Nobody needs to have it now. The one thing is as genteel as the other, and it makes a great difference to the purse."

"Doesn't it?" said Mona sympathetically, thankful that no answer had been required to the original question. "And after all," she thought, "when I am living a life like that of the cabbages at the back, what do I want with the 'care-breaking luxury'?"

"I hope you don't object to the shop," Rachel went on presently, *à propos* apparently of the idea of gentility. "I don't really need it now, and it never did very much in the way of business at the best; but I have got used to the people dropping in, and I would miss it. And you know the ladies, the minister's wife and the doctor's wife like, they come in sometimes and have a cup of tea with me; they don't think me any the less genteel for keeping a shop. But I always tell everybody that it is not that I require to do it. Everybody in Borrowness knows that, and of course it makes a difference."

"The question of 'gentility,'" said Mona, with a comical and saving recollection of Lucy's letter, "seems to me to depend entirely on who does a thing, and the spirit in which it is done, not on the thing itself."

"That is just it. They all know me, you see, and they know I am not really caring about the shop at all. Why, they can see that whiles I lock the door behind me and go away for a whole day together."

Mona bit her lip and did not attempt an answer this time.

It was still early when she excused herself and went to her room. She paced up and down for a time, and then stopped suddenly in front of the looking-glass. It had become a habit with her, in the course of her lonely life, to address her own image as if it were another person.

"It is not that it is terrible," she said gravely; "I almost wish it were; it is just that it is all so deadly commonplace. Oh, Lucy, I *am* an abject idiot!" And like the heroines of

the good old days, when advanced women were unknown, she threw herself on the great four-post bed and burst into a passion of tears.

The torrent was violent but not prolonged. In a few minutes she threw away her handkerchief and looked scornfully at her swollen face.

"After all," she said philosophically, "I suppose a good howl was the cheapest way of managing the thing in the long-run. That will be the beginning and the end of it. *Hörst du wohl?*—And if it so please you, Mistress Lucy, I don't regret what I have done one bit, and I would do the same thing to-morrow."

She curtseyed low to the imaginary Lucy, betook herself to bed, and in spite of grief, excitement, and anxiety, in spite of ham and egg, strong tea and hot buttered toast, she slept like a healthy animal till sunrise.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SHOP.

No; it was clear that nothing could be done with her bedroom. That was a case for pure and unmitigated endurance. Mona felt thankful, as she looked round in the morning sunshine, that she had not brought with her any of the pictures and pots and artistic draperies without which young people find it almost impossible to travel nowadays. The heavy cumbrous furniture might possibly have been subdued into insignificance; but any moderately æsthetic colour would have been drowned in the harsh dominant note shrieked out by the old-world wall-paper.

She adhered rigidly to her resolution that last night's "howl" was to be the "beginning and the end of it"; but as

she leaned back on the stiff, hard pillows, her hands clasped behind her head, she looked the whole situation fairly in the face. It was not an inviting prospect by any means, but she was still young and enthusiastic, and resolution was strong within her.

"Good workmen do good work in any sphere," she thought, "and bad workmen do bad work in any sphere. It lies with myself. The game is all in my own hands. Heaven help me!"

"I hope you slept well," said her cousin, as she entered the parlour for breakfast.

"I never slept better in my life," said Mona cordially.

"That's right!" and Rachel, who had suffered sundry qualms of doubt in the small hours of the morning, who had even drifted within a measurable distance of the appalling heresy that blood might not always and under all circumstances be thicker than water, was not a little comforted and strengthened in her old belief. It did still require an effort of faith to conceive that she would ever feel as much at her ease with Mona as she had done with her niece; but then, on the other hand, Mona was so very stylish—"quite the lady"; and if she did not prove much of a hand at trimming bonnets, her manner was certainly cut out for "standing behind the counter."

"Were you meaning to go out this forenoon?" asked Rachel.

"I will do whatever you like. I have not made any plans."

"I was thinking it's such a fine day I might go over to Kirkstoun—it's only a mile and a quarter from here. Mrs Smith, a friend of mine there, lost her mother a few weeks ago, and I've never got to see her since. Her husband's cousin was married on my sister Jane, so she won't think it very neighbourly my never going near her."

"How very unpleasant for Jane!" was Mona's first thought. "I hope her husband's cousin was not very heavy;" but aloud she said—

"And you would like me to sit in the shop while you are away? I will, with pleasure. It will be quite amusing."

"No, you don't need to sit in the shop. As like as not nobody will be in; but you never can tell. You can sit at the window in the front parlour, and watch the people passing, and if the bell rings you'll be sure to hear it. If there does anybody come, Sally can tell you the price of anything you don't know."

"Thank you."

"Of course, I might take you with me and lock the door, or leave Sally to mind the shop. I'm sure Mrs Smith would be delighted to see you at any other time, but she being in affliction like——"

"Oh, of course. She would much rather have you to herself. Anybody would under the circumstances."

"That's just it. If the weather keeps up so that we can wear our best things, I'll take you round to call on all my friends next week. There's really no pleasure in it when you've to tuck up your dress and take off your waterproof at every door."

"That is very true," said Mona cordially. "There is no pleasure in wearing pretty things unless one can do it in comfort; and when I don my best bib and tucker, I like to show them to advantage. I am afraid, though," she added, with real regret, "I have not got a dress you will care for much."

"Oh, I daresay you'll do very well. The great thing is to look the lady."

They went on with breakfast in silence, but presently Rachel resumed—

"I daresay you'd like to go out on the braes, or down on the beach this afternoon. Now I wonder if there is any one could go with you? There's Mary Jane Anderson across the way; she's always ready to oblige me, but they've a dressmaker in the house just now."

"Oh, I think we won't trouble Miss Anderson this afternoon, thank you, dear. I love to explore new places for

myself, and I will give you all my original impressions when I come in. I can't tell you what a treat it is to me to live by the sea. I am sure I should find it company enough at any time."

"Well, it's a great thing to be easily pleased. My dear"—Rachel hesitated—"if anybody should come in, you won't say anything about your meaning to be a doctor?"

Mona was much amused. "I should never even think of such a thing," she said. "You may depend upon me, cousin Rachel, not to mention the fact to any one so long as I am with you."

They rose from the table, and after a great deal of preparation Rachel set out in her "best things," without fear of rain.

"Mind you make yourself comfortable," she said, reopening the door after she had closed it behind her. "I daresay you'll like the rocking-chair, and you'll find some bound volumes of the *Sunday at Home* in the parlour."

"Thank you," said Mona; "I do like a rocking-chair immensely."

The first thing she did, however, when her cousin was gone, was to get half-a-dozen strong pieces of firewood from Sally, and prop open all the windows in the house. Then she proceeded to make a prolonged and leisurely survey of the shop.

Accustomed as she was to shopping in London, where the large and constant turnover, the regular "clearing sales," and the unremitting competition, combine to keep the goods fresh and modern, where the smallest crease or dust-mark on any article is a sufficient reason for a substantial reduction in its price, she was simply appalled at the crushed, dusty, expensive, old-fashioned goods that formed the greater part of her cousin's stock-in-trade.

"I shudder to think what these things may have cost to begin with," she said, straightening herself up at last with a heavy sigh; "but I should like to see the person who would take the whole thing, lock, stock, and barrel, in exchange for a five-pound note!"

She had just come to this conclusion when the shop-bell rang, and an elderly woman came in.

"Good morning," said Mona pleasantly.

The woman stared. She did not wish to be rude, but on the other hand she did not wish to be ridiculous, and such gratuitous civility from a stranger, in the discharge of an everyday matter of business, seemed to her nothing short of that; so she was silent.

"A yard o' penny elastic," she said, when she had sufficiently recovered from her surprise to speak.

Mona bowed, and took down the box from its place on the shelf.

"If ye've no' got onything better than ye had the last time," continued the woman, looking suspiciously at the battered pasteboard box, "I'll no trouble ye. It lookit weel eneuch, but it a' gaed intae bits the meenit it was touched."

Mona examined the contents of the box critically.

"I certainly cannot recommend this," she said. "It's too old. We" — she suppressed a laugh that nearly choked her, as she found the familiar expression on her lips—"we shall be getting some in next week."

"It's twa month sin' I got the last," said the woman severely. "It doesna seem vera business-like tae be sellin' the same stuff yet."

"That is true," said Mona frankly. "It must have been overlooked. I suppose there are other shops in the town where you can get what you want. If not, you can depend on getting it here this day week. Can I show you anything else?" "Not that there is a single thing in the shop I can show with much satisfaction to myself," she added mentally.

The woman frowned.

"I want some knittin'-needles the size o' that," she said, laying a half-finished stocking on the counter.

Mona drew a long breath of relief. Knitting-needles could not go bad like elastic; and if they were rusty, she could rub them up with emery-paper.

She opened the box with considerable satisfaction, but to her

dismay she found needles of all sizes mixed up in inextricable confusion, and the bit of notched metal with which she had seen shopkeepers determine the size was missing. She knew this exacting old woman would never allow her to depend on her eye, and she hunted here, there, and everywhere, in vain. She preserved her calmness outwardly, but her forehead was moist with anxiety, when at length, more by good luck than good guidance, she opened the cash-drawer and found in it the missing gauge. Poor Mona! She experienced the same sense of relief that she had sometimes felt in the anatomy-room, when a nerve, of which she had given up all hope, appeared sound and entire in her dissection.

With some difficulty she found four needles of the same size, and wrapping them neatly in paper, she gave them to her customer. She was proceeding to open the door, but the old woman seemed to have something more to say.

"I aye like to gie my custom to Miss Simpson," she said. "But what like way is this tae manage? And ye seem tae be new tae the business yersel'."

"I am," said Mona, "but I am very willing to learn. If you will have a little patience, you will find that in time I shall improve."

She spoke with absolute sincerity. She had forgotten that her life stretched out beyond the limits of this narrow shop; she felt herself neither more nor less than what she was at the moment—a very inefficient young shopkeeper.

"Weel, there's nae sayin'. I'll be back this day week for that elastic;" and Mona bowed her first customer out.

She stood for a minute or two, with her eyes fixed on the floor, in a brown study.

"Well," she said at last, "if any lady or gentleman thinks that shopkeeping is child's-play, I am prepared to show that lady or gentleman a thing or two!"

She had scarcely seated herself behind the counter, when the bell rang again, and this time the customer appeared to be a servant-girl. In spite of her tawdry dress, Mona took a fancy to her face at once, the more so as it did not seem to

bespeak a very critical mind. In fact, it was the customer who was ill at ease on this occasion, and who waited shyly to be spoken to.

"What can I do for you?" asked Mona.

"I want a new haat."

Only for one moment had Mona thoughts of referring her to the nearest clergyman. Then she realised the situation.

"Oh!" she said. This was still a heavy responsibility. "Do you know exactly what you want, or would you like to see what we can suggest?"

"I'd like tae see what ye've got."

"Is the hat for week-days or for Sundays?"

"For the Sabbath. Miss Simpson had some big red roses in the window a while back. I thocht ane or twa o' them wad gang vera weel wi' this feather."

Mona took the small paper parcel in her hand, and gave her attention as completely to its contents as she had ever done to a microscopic section. It had been an ostrich-feather at some period of its existence, but it bore more resemblance to a herring-bone now.

"Yes," she said tentatively. "The feather would have to be done up. But don't you think it is rather a pity to have both flowers and feathers in one hat?"

The girl looked aghast. This was heresy indeed.

"The feather's gey thin by itsel'," she said, "but if it was half covered up wi' the flowers, it 'd look more dressed like."

Mona looked at the feather, then at the girl, and then she relapsed into profound meditation.

"Are you a servant?" she asked presently.

"Ay."

"Here in Borrowness?"

"Na; I've come in for the day tae see my mither. I'm scullery-maid at the Towers."

"What a pass things must have come to," thought Mona, "that even a scullery-maid should be allowed to dress like this in a good house!"

"The Towers!" she said aloud. "You have been very

lucky to get into such a place. Why, if you do your best to learn all you can, you will be a first-rate cook some day."

The girl beamed.

"You know," Mona went on reflectively, "a really first-class London servant would think it beneath her to wear either feathers or flowers. She would have a neat little bonnet like this"—she picked out one of the few desirable articles in the shop—"and she would have it plainly trimmed with a bit of good ribbon or velvet—so!"

She twisted a piece of velvet round the front of the bonnet and put it on her own head. Surmounting her trim gown, with its spotless collar and cuffs, the bonnet looked very well, and to Mona's great surprise it appealed even to the crude taste of her customer.

"It's gey stylish," said the girl, "an' I suppose it 'd come a deal cheaper?"

"No," said Mona. "It would not come any cheaper at the moment, if you get a good straw; but it would last as long as half-a-dozen hats with flowers and feathers. You see, it's like this," she went on, leaning forward on the counter in her earnestness, "you want to look like the ladies at the Towers. Well, it is very natural that you should; we all want to look like the people we admire. The ladies have good things, and plenty of them; but that requires money, and those of us who have not got much money must be content, to be like them in one way or the other,—we must either have good things or plenty of things. A *common* servant buys cheap satins, and flowers and laces that look shabby in a week. No one mistakes her for a lady, and she does not look like a good servant. A really first-class maid, as I said before, gets a few good simple things, that wear a long time, and she looks—well—a great deal more like a lady than the other does!"

The girl hesitated. "I daursay I'd get mair guid o' the bannet," she said.

"I am sure you would. But I don't want you to decide in a hurry. Take time to think it over."

"Na, I'll tak' the bannet."

Then ensued a discussion of details, and at last the girl prepared to go.

"And when you are getting a new dress," said Mona, "get one that will go well with the bonnet—a plain dark-blue or black serge. You will never tire of that, and you have no idea how nice you will look in it."

The girl looked admiringly at Mona's own simple gown, and went away smiling.

"If all my customers were like that," thought Mona, "I should be strongly inclined to pitch my tent in Borrowness for the rest of my natural life."

Truly, it never rains but it pours. Scarcely had Mona closed the door on customer Number Two, when customer Number Three appeared, and customer Number Three was a man.

"Good morning," he said courteously.

"Good morning, sir."

"I wonder if you have got such a thing as a really good piece of india-rubber."

Mona took some in from the window, but it was hard and brittle.

"That is of no use," she said, "but I have some more upstairs."

A few months before, in Tottenham Court Road, she had, as Lucy expressed it, "struck a rich vein of india-rubber," pliable, elastic, and neatly bevelled into dainty pieces. Mona had been busy with some fine histological drawings at the time, and had laid in a small stock, a sample of which she now produced.

"I think you will find that quite satisfactory," she said, quietly putting pencil and paper before him.

He tried it.

"Why, I never had such a piece of india-rubber in my life before," he said, looking up in surprise, and their eyes met with one of those rare sympathetic smiles which are sometimes called forth by a common appreciation of even the most trivial things.

"I am taking advantage of a holiday to make some diagrams," he went on, "and, when one is in a hurry, bread is a very poor makeshift for india-rubber."

Diagrams! The word sounded like an old friend. Mona quite longed to know what they were—botanical? anatomical? physiological? She merely assented in a word, however, and with another courteous "Good morning" he went away.

"A nice shopkeeper I make," she said scornfully. "Firstly, I promise to get in new goods without knowing that the proceeding is practicable. Secondly, I undertake to make a bonnet, which will doubtless prove to be entirely beyond my powers. Thirdly, I give an estimate for said bonnet, which won't allow sixpence for the trouble of trimming. Fourthly, I sell a piece of my own india-rubber without so much as a farthing of profit. No, my dear girl, it must be frankly admitted that, on to-day's examination, you have made something like *minus* fifty per cent!"

CHAPTER XII.

CASTLE MACLEAN.

The sunlight broke and sparkled on the sea, and all the flowering grasses on the braes were dancing in the wind. Numberless rugged spurs of rock, crossing the strip of sand and shingle, stretched out into the water, and the long trails of *Fucus* fell and rose with the ebb and flow of every wave.

Mona was half intoxicated with delight. The mid-day dinner had been rather a trial to her. The "silver" was far from bright, and the crystal was far from clear; and although the table-cloth was clean, it might to all intents and purposes have been a sheet, so little pretension did it make to its

proper gloss and sheen. It seemed incredible that, within little more than a stone's-throw of the dusty shop and the musty parlour, there should be such a world of freshness, and openness, and beauty. No need for any one to grow petty and narrow-minded here, when a mere "Open Sesame" was sufficient to bring into view this great, glowing, bountiful Nature.

"It is mine, mine, mine," she said to herself. "Nobody in all the world can take it from me." And she sang softly to music of her own—

> "'Tis heaven alone that is given away,
> 'Tis only God may be had for the asking."

This stretch of breezy coast meant for her all that the secret passage to the *abbé's* cell meant for Monte Christo—knowledge, and wisdom, and companionship, and untold treasures.

A little distance off, a great column of rock rose abruptly from the beach, and Mona found to her delight that, with a little easy scrambling, she could reach the summit by means of a rude natural staircase at one side. On the top the rocks were moulded by rain and wave into nooks and hollows, and there was a fairy carpet of small shells and shingle, sea-campions and thrift. In front of her, for leagues and leagues, stretched the rippling, dazzling sea; behind rose the breezy braes; and away to the left the afternoon sun shone on the red roofs, and was flashed back from the museum windows and weather-cocks of Kirkstoun. Mona selected a luxurious arm-chair, and ensconced herself comfortably for the afternoon.

The old clock was striking five when she entered the house.

"I do hope I am not late for tea," she said. "I have had such a lovely time!"

"I see that," said Rachel, smiling involuntarily as her eyes fell on the bright glowing face. "Get off your things, and come away."

"And look, I found a treasure," said Mona re-entering, "some Bloody Cranesbill."

"Eh? Is that what you call it? It's a queer-like name. It's gey common about here. You'll find plenty of it by the roadside among the fields."

"Really? Or do you mean the Meadow Cranesbill? It is very like this, but purpler, and it has two flowers on each stalk instead of one."

As Rachel belonged to that large section of the community which would be wholly at a loss for a reply if asked whether a primrose and a buttercup had four petals or six, she remained discreetly silent.

But, curiously enough, Mona's childlike and unaffected delight in the sea and the flowers set her cousin more nearly at ease than anything had done yet.

"After all," she thought, "it's a great thing for a town-bred girl to stay in the country for a change, and with her own flesh and blood too. She must have been dull enough, poor thing, alone in London."

"When you want to get rid of me for a whole day," said Mona presently, "I mean to go off on a botanising excursion round the coast. I am sure there must be lots of treasures blushing unseen."

"We'll do something better than that," said Rachel, after a moment's hesitation as to whether the occasion were worthy of a trump-card. "Some fine day, if we are spared, we'll take the coach to St Rules, and see all the sights. There's a shop in South Street where we can get pies and lemonade, and we'll have an egg to our tea when we come back."

"I should dearly like to see St Rules," said Mona. "I have heard of the sea-girt castle all my life; and the prospect of an 'egg to my tea' is a great additional attraction. I cannot tell you all the gala memories of childhood that the idea calls up—picnics in pine-woods, and break-neck scrambles, and all sorts of adventures."

She did not add that "pies and lemonade" were not a part of those gala memories; but in truth the idea of lunch-

ing "genteelly" with Rachel, on that squalid fare in a shop, depressed her as few hardships could have done.

"What are you in the way of taking to your supper in London?" asked Rachel. "I usually have porridge myself, but it's not everybody that can take them."

"Oh, let us have porridge by all means! I believe the two characteristics by which you can always diagnose a Scotchman are a taste for porridge and a keen appreciation of the bagpipes. I mean to prove worthy of my nationality."

"And do you like them thick or thin?"

"The bagpipes? Oh, the porridge! The question seems to be a momentous one, and unless I leave it to you, I must decide in the dark. I imagine—it would be safer to say thin."

"Well, I always take them thin myself," said Rachel, in a tone of relief; "but some people—you'd wonder!—they like them that thick that a spoon will stand up in the middle! It's curious how tastes differ, but it takes all sorts to make a world, they say."

"Verily," said Mona earnestly. "But now I must tell you about my customers. You have not even asked whether I had any, and I assure you I had a most exciting time."

"Well, I never! Was there anybody in? I was that taken up with Mrs Smith, you see, poor body!"

"Of course. But now you must know in the first place that I had three, whole, live customers," and Mona proceeded to give a pretty full account of the experiences of the morning.

"That would be Mistress Dickson—I ken fine," said Rachel, relapsing in her excitement into the Doric, "a fractious, fault-finding body. I'm sure she may take her custom elsewhere, and welcome, for me. I never heard the like. She aye has an eye to a good bargain, and if I say I make sixpence profit out of her in a twelvemonth, it's more likely above the mark than below it."

"That I can quite believe," said Mona; "but you know,

dear, the elastic had perished, and she was quite right to complain of that. We must get some fresh in the course of the week."

"Hoot awa! We'll do nothing of the sort. If the traveller comes round between this and then, we'll take some off him, but I'll not stir a foot to oblige old Betsy Dickson. She knows quite well that I don't need to keep the shop."

"But, dear,"—Mona seated herself on a stool at her cousin's feet, and laid her white hand on the wrinkled red one,—"I don't see that requiring to keep the shop has anything to do with it. If we keep it at all, surely we ought to keep it really well."

"And who says I don't keep it well? Nobody heeds old Betsy and her grumbling. Everything I buy is the best of its kind; not the tawdry stuff you get in the London shops, that's only got up to sell. You don't know a good tape and stay-lace when you see them, or I wouldn't need to tell you that."

"I am quite sure of it. But you know, dear, you can get good things as well as bad in the London shops, and you can get them fresh and wonderfully cheap. The next time you want a good many things, I wish you would let me go to London for them. I am sure at the Stores and some other places I know, I could make better bargains than you can with your traveller; and I would bring a lot of those dainty novelties that people expect to pay dear for in the provinces. We would make our little shop the talk of the country-side."

"Hoot, havers, lassie!" laughed Rachel, no more entertaining the idea than if Mona had suggested a voyage to the North Pole. "Why, I declare," she added, with a renewal of that agreeable sense of superiority, "you're not like me; you're a born shopkeeper after all! But who else was in?"

Mona drew a long face. "There was a *man*," she said, with mock solemnity.

"Oh! I wonder who it would be? What like was he?"

"Tall," said Mona, ticking off his various attributes on

the fingers of her left hand, "thin, ugly, lanky. In fact,"—she broke off with a laugh,—"in spite of his height, he conveyed a general impression to my mind of what one of our lecturers describes as 'failure to attain the anatomical and physiological ideal.' He was loosely hung together like a cheap clothes-horse, and he wore his garments in much the same fashion that a clothes-horse does." (This, as her customer's tailor could have certified, was most unjust. A vivid recollection of the Sahib was making Mona hypercritical.) "The down of manhood had not settled on his upper lip with what you could call luxuriance; he wore spectacles——"

"Spectacles!" repeated Rachel, alighting with relief on a bit of firm foothold in a stretch of quicksand. "You don't mean—was he a *gentleman?*"

"I suppose so. Yes."

"Oh! I might have gone on guessing for an hour. You said he was a *man.*"

"God made him, and so I was prepared to let him pass for one, as Portia says. Did you think the term was too complimentary?"

Rachel laughed. "Had he on a suit of dark-blue serge?"

"Now you suggest it, I believe he had."

"And had he a pleasant frank-like way with him?"

"Yes."

"It would be Dr Dudley. What was he wanting here?"

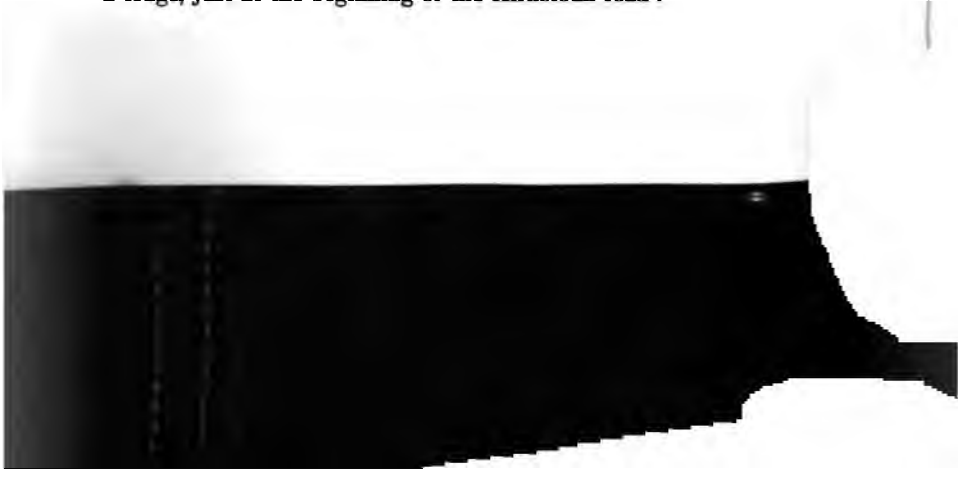
"India-rubber."

"Well, I am sure there was plenty of that. I got a boxful years and years ago, and nobody has been asking for it at all lately."

"I should imagine not," thought Mona. "Once bit, twice shy."

"Is he the resident doctor?" she asked.

"Oh no! He does not belong to these parts. He comes from London. When you were going down to the braes, did you notice a big white house with a large garden and a lodge, just at the beginning of the Kirkstoun road?"



don't think it is a common fault of mine to be too ready to interfere with other people; but the girl looked so quiet and sensible, in spite of her trumpery clothes. Servants never used to dress like that; but perhaps, like a child, I have been building a little sand-dyke to prevent the tide from coming in."

"What I can't see is, why you should trouble yourself about what they wear. One would think, to hear you talk, that it was a question of honesty or religion like."

Mona sighed again, and then laughed a little bitterly. "No doubt the folks here could instruct me in matters of honesty and religion," she said; "but I did fancy this morning that I could teach that child a thing or two about her bonnet."

"Oh, well, I daresay she'll be in on Monday morning to say she's thought better of it."

There was a long silence, and then Rachel went on, "My dear, how ever did you come by that extraordinary name? I never heard the like of it. They called your mother Margaret, didn't they?"

"Yes, Margaret is my own second name, but I never use it. So long as a name is distinctive, the shorter it is, the better."

"H'm. It would have been a deal wiser-like if you'd left out the Mona. I can't bring it over my tongue at all."

And in fact, as long as Mona lived with her cousin, she was constrained to answer to the appellation of "my dear."

"My dear," said Rachel now, "I don't think I ever heard what church you belong to."

Mona started. "I was brought up in the Church of England," she said.

"Surely your father never belonged to the Church of England?"

"He usually attended the church service out in India with my mother. I don't think he considered himself, strictly speaking, a member of any individual church, although he was a very religious man."

"Ay. I've heard that he wasn't exactly sound."

"I fancy he would be considered absolutely sound now-a-days,—

'For in this windy world,
What's up is faith, what's down is heresy.'"

Rachel looked puzzled. "Oh!" she said with sudden comprehension. "No, no, you mustn't say that. Truth is always the same."

"From the point of view of Deity, no doubt; but to us poor 'minnows in the creek' every wave is practically a fresh creation."

"I wish you'd been brought up a Baptist," said Rachel uneasily. "It's all so simple and definite, and there's Scripture for everything we believe. You must have a talk with the minister. He's a grand Gospel preacher, and great at discussions on Baptist principles."

"Dear cousin," said Mona, "five years ago I should have enjoyed nothing better than such a discussion, but it seems to me now that silence is best. The faith we argue about is rarely the faith we live by; and if it is—so much the worse for our lives."

"But how are we to learn any better if we don't talk?"

"Surely it is by silence that we learn the best things. It was from the loneliness of the Mount that Moses brought down the tables of stone."

"I don't see what that has to do with it. There's many a one in the town has been brought round to sound Baptist principles by a sermon, or an argument on the subject. I believe you've no notion, my dear, how the whole Bible, looked at in the right way, points to the fact that the Baptists hold the true doctrine and practice. There's Philip and the Eunuch, and the Paschal Lamb—no, that's the plan of salvation,—and the passage of the Red Sea, and the true meaning of the Greek word translated 'baptise.' We'd a missionary preaching here last Sabbath, and he said he had not the smallest doubt that China, in common with the

whole world, would eventually become Baptist. That was how he put it—'eventually become Baptist.'"

"'A consummation devoutly to be wished,' no doubt," said Mona, "but did the missionary point out in what respect the world would be the 'forrader'?"

A moment later she would have given anything to recall the words. They had slipped out almost involuntarily, and besides, she had never lived in a Dissenting circle, and she had no conception how very real Rachel's Baptist principles were to her, nor how she longed to witness the surprise of the "many mighty and many wise," when, contrary to their expectations, they beheld the whole world "eventually become Baptist."

"Forgive me, dear," said Mona. "I did not mean to hurt you, I am only stupid; I don't understand these things."

"To my mind," said Rachel severely, "obedience to the revealed will of God is none the less a duty because our salvation does not actually depend upon it,—though I doubt not some difference will be made, at the last day, between those who saw His will and those who shut their eyes and hardened their hearts. I have a very low opinion of the Church of England myself, and Mr Stuart says the same."

"Have you a Baptist Church here in Borrowness?" asked Mona, thinking it well to change the subject.

"No; though there are a good few Baptists. We walk over to Kirkstoun. I suppose you will be going to sit under Mr Ewing?"

"Who is he?"

"The English Church minister. His chapel is near Mrs Hamilton's house. He has not got the root of the matter in him at all. He's a good deal taken up by the gentry at the Towers; and he raises prize poultry,—queer-like occupation for a minister."

"If it will give you any pleasure," said Mona, with rash catholicity, "I will go to church with you every Sunday morning."

Rachel's rubicund face beamed.

"You will find it very quiet, after the fashionable service you're used to," she said; "but you'll hear the true Word of God there."

"That is saying much," said Mona rather drearily; "but I don't go to a fashionable church in London;" and a pang of genuine home-sickness shot through her heart, as she thought of the dear, barn-like old chapel in Bloomsbury, whither she had gone Sunday after Sunday in search of "beautiful thoughts."

"You tactless brute," she said to herself as she set her candlestick on the dressing-table that evening, "if you have only come here to tread on that good soul's corns, the sooner you tramp back to London the better."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CHAPEL.

The next morning the sun rose into a cloudless blue sky, and Mona found herself looking forward with pleasure to the walk into Kirkstoun. The road lay along the coast, and was separated from the sea by a stretch of yellow corn-fields. The inland scenery was flat and tame, but, after the massive grandeur of Norway, Mona's eye rested with quiet satisfaction on the smiling acres, cut into squares, like a giant's chess-board, by scraggy hedges and lichen-grown dykes.

They had gone about half-way, when a pleasant voice behind them said, "Good morning, Miss Simpson."

"Oh, good morning, doctor! My dear, this is Dr Dudley."

He lifted his hat and accommodated his long ramshackle stride to Rachel's podgy steps.

"How goes the rheumatism?" he asked.

"It's wonderful, doctor. Whenever I feel a twinge, I get the chemist to make me up some of those powders of yours, and they work like magic."

"That's right. You will give me a testimonial, won't you?"

"That I will, with all my heart. But you are surely forsaking Mr Ewing this morning? What will he say to that?"

"Even so, Miss Simpson. Fortunately, Mr Ewing is not touchy on that score. Your Mr Stuart asked me with charming frankness to come and hear him, so I am taking the first opportunity of accepting his invitation."

"I'm glad to hear it. You will hear a very different sermon to one of Mr Ewing's."

He laughed. "Mr Ewing is not a Chrysostom," he said, "but he is a good fellow and a gentleman, and in that capacity I think he has a distinctly refining influence on his people."

"No doubt, doctor; but don't you think it is better to have the water of life in an earthen vessel——?"

"Ah, yes," he said, with sudden seriousness. "If you give us the water of life, we won't stop to criticise the bowl."

"Well, you wait till you hear Mr Stuart."

An almost imperceptible smile played about his mouth. He glanced at Mona, and found her eyes fixed on his face; but she looked away instantly. She would not be guilty of the disloyalty to Rachel involved in the subtlest voluntary glance of comprehension; but her face was a very eloquent one, and his short-sighted eyes were quick.

"*Que diable allait-elle faire dans cette galère?*" he thought.

"My dear," said Rachel to Mona, in that mysterious tone invariably assumed by some people when they speak of things sacred, "we always have the Communion after the morning service. Were you meaning to stay?"

"You would not have me, would you?"

"You'd wonder." Rachel raised her voice. "We're very wide. Mr Stuart has got into trouble with several other

ministers in the Union for his liberality. He says he will turn away no man who is a converted Christian."

Dr Dudley's eyes sparkled. "I should have thought a converted pagan would be even dearer to Stuart's heart."

"So he would, so he would, doctor. You know what I mean. Mr Stuart says the simple name Christian is not sufficient nowadays, because so many folks who call themselves by that name fight shy of the word 'converted.'"

Again Dr Dudley glanced at Mona, but this time she was on her guard.

"I think it is one of the grandest words I know," she said proudly, looking straight in front of her. "But I think I won't stay to-day, dear, thank you. Shall I wait for you?"

"Please yourself, my dear, please yourself. There's always quite a party of us walks home together."

They had entered the quaint old town, and were greeted by a strong smell of fish and of sea-weed, as they descended a steep angular street to the shore. Here a single row of uneven shops and tenements faced the harbour, alive to-day with the rich tints and picturesque outlines of well-patched canvas sails; and brown-faced, flaxen-haired babies basked on the flags at the mouths of the closes. A solitary gig was rattling over the stones, with a noise and stir quite disproportionate to its size and importance; and the natives, Bible in hand, were quietly discussing the last haul of herring on their way to the kirk.

Rachel led the way up another steep little hill, away from the sea; and they entered the dark, narrow, sunless street, where the chapel stood in well-to-do simplicity, opposite a large and odoriferous tannery.

The interior of the chapel opened up another new corner of the world for Mona. Fresh paint and varnish and crimson cushions gave a general impression of smug respectability, and half the congregation had duly assembled in Sunday attire; the women in well-preserved Paisley shawls and purple bonnet-strings, the little girls in blue ribbons and pink roses, and the boys severely superior in uncompromising,

ill-fitting Sabbath suits, with an extra supply of "grease" on their home-cropped hair. Already there was a distinct suspicion of peppermint in the atmosphere, and the hymn-books and Bibles on the book-boards were interspersed with stray marigolds and half-withered sprigs of southernwood.

There was nothing remarkable about either service or sermon. The latter was a fair average specimen of thousands that were being delivered throughout the country at the same moment. Those in sympathy with the preacher would have found something to admire—those out of sympathy, something to smile at; probably there was not a single word that would have surprised or startled any one.

The sun became very hot about noon. The air in the chapel grew closer and closer, the varnish on the pews more and more sticky, and the smell of peppermint stronger every minute. A small boy beside Mona fell asleep immediately after the first hymn; and, but for the constant intervention of Dr Dudley, who sat behind, a well-oiled little head would have fallen on her arm a dozen times in the course of the service. She was thankful that she had not promised to wait for Rachel, and as soon as the benediction had been pronounced, she escaped into the fresh air like an uncaged bird.

She had not walked far before she was overtaken by Dr Dudley.

"Well," he said, "you will be glad to hear that the india-rubber has been doing yeoman service."

Mona bowed without replying. She was annoyed with him for entering into conversation with her in this matter-of-course way. No doubt he thought that a shop-girl would be only too much flattered by his condescension.

But Dudley was thinking more of her face than of her silence. One did not often see a face like that. He had been watching it all through the sermon, and it tempted him to go on.

"Pathetic soul, that," he said.

"Mr Stuart?" asked Mona indifferently.

"Yes. He is quite a study to me when I come down here. He is struggling out of the mire of mediocrity, and he might as well save himself the trouble."

Mona smiled in spite of herself—a quick, appreciative smile—and Dudley hesitated no longer.

"After undergoing agonies of doubt, and profound study —of Joseph Cook—he has decided 'to accept evolution within limits,' as he phrases it. I believe he never enters the pulpit now without an agreeable and galling sense of how he might electrify his congregation if he only chose, and of how his scientific culture is thrown away on a handful of fisher-folk."

Dr Dudley was amused with himself for talking in this strain; but in his present mood he would have discussed the minister with his horse or his dog, had either of them been his sole companion; and besides, he was interested to see how Mona would take his character-sketch. Would she understand his nineteenth-century jargon?

Her answer was intelligent if non-committal.

"He must be a man of sense and of self-repression," she said quietly.

"Well, he does not preach the survival of the fittest and the action of environment, certainly; but that is just where the pathos of it comes in. If he were the man he thinks he is, he would preach those things in spite of himself, and without his people finding it out. The fact is, that in the course of his life he has assimilated two doctrines, and only two,— —Justification by Faith—or his own version of the same,— and Baptism by Immersion as a profession of Faith. Anything else that he has acquired, or will acquire, is the merest accretion, and not a part of himself at all."

"In other words, he resembles ninety-nine-hundredths of the human race."

Dudley laughed. "Perhaps," he said. "Poor Stuart! I believe that in every new hearer he sees a possible interesting young sceptic, on whom he longs to try the force of concession. Such a tussle is the *Ultima Thule* of his ambition."

"It seems a pity that it should not be realised. The interesting young sceptic is a common species enough nowadays, and he rarely has any objection to posing in that capacity."

Dr Dudley had not been studying her for nothing all morning. Her tone jarred on him now, and he looked at her with his quick, keen glance.

"I wonder how long it is——" he said, and then he decided that the remark was quite unwarrantable.

Mona's stiffness thawed in a quiet laugh.

"Since I was an interesting young sceptic myself?" she said. "I suppose I did lay myself open to that. Oh, it is a long, long time! I don't find it easy to build a new Rome on the ashes of one that has been destroyed."

"Don't you?" he said, with quick comprehension. "I think I do, rather. It is such a ghastly sensation to have no Rome.

'Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul—'"

"Go on," said Mona.

"'Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul,
As the swift seasons roll!
Leave thy low-vaulted past.
Let each new temple, nobler than the last,
Shut thee from heaven by a dome more vast;
Till thou at length art free,
Leaving thine outgrown shell by life's unresting sea!'"

Then suddenly it flashed on Mona wherein his great charm lay. He had one of the most beautiful voices she had ever heard.

"We might strike down to the beach here," he said, "and go home by the braes. It is ever so much pleasanter."

"Not to-day, I think," said Mona; but what she meant was, "Not with you."

They were deep in conversation when they reached Mrs Hamilton's gate, and he was almost in the act of walking on

with her to her own door; but he suddenly remembered who she was, and thought better of it. Not a very noble consideration, perhaps, when looked at from the standpoint of eternity; but even the best of us do not at all times look at life from the standpoint of eternity.

"Who is that young—person, who lives with Miss Simpson?" he asked his aunt as they sat at lunch. He would have said "young lady" but for Mrs Hamilton's well-known prejudices on the subject. "She seems remarkably intelligent."

"She's a niece, I believe. Yes, she's sensible enough. I have not seen them since I came back."

"But you don't mean to say her mother was Miss Simpson's sister?"

"I suppose so. Why not?"

"Why not? Talk of freaks of Nature! This girl seems to be a sort of hidden genius."

"Oh, Ralph, come!" said the old lady, with a twinkle in her eye. "There's plenty of backbiting in Borrowness, and Miss Simpson's niece must expect to come in for her share of it, but I never heard *that* said of her yet!"

CHAPTER XIV.

REACTION.

The first fortnight of Mona's stay at Borrowness was drawing to a close, and she was wellnigh prostrated with sheer physical reaction.

"It is certainly my due, after all the pleasant excitement of Norway," she thought; for she would not admit, even to herself, that the strain of settling down to these new con-

ditions of life had taxed her nerves more than medical study and examinations had ever been able to do.

She tried hard to be brave and bright, but even Rachel's unobservant eye could not always fail to notice the contrast between her gaiety of manner and the almost woe-begone expression which her face sometimes wore in repose. Even the welcome arrival of the traveller, with samples of elastic, *inter alia*, only roused her for a few minutes from the lethargy into which she had fallen. If she could have spent a good deal of her time at Castle Maclean, as she had dubbed the column of rock on the beach, things would have been more bearable; but the weather continued fine, and Rachel insisted on making an interminable round of dreary afternoon calls.

Day after day they put on their "best things," and sallied forth, to sit by the hour in rose-scented parlours and exert themselves to talk about nothing. Even in this, under ordinary circumstances, Mona would have found abundant amusement, but it was not the most appropriate treatment for a profound fit of depression.

"I suppose, if I had eyes to see it, these people are all intensely interesting," she said to herself; "but, heaven help me, I find them as dull as ditch-water!"

This opinion was probably mutual, for Mona's sprightliness of manner had entirely deserted her for the moment. It was all she could do to be tolerably amiable, and to speak when she was spoken to. Some of the people they called upon remembered vaguely that her father had been a great man, and treated her with exaggerated respect in consequence; but to the majority she was simply Rachel Simpson's cousin, a person of very small account in the Borrowness world.

"We have still to go and see Auntie Bell," said Rachel at last; "but we'll wait till Mr Hogg can drive us out in his machine. He is always ready to oblige me."

"Who is Auntie Bell?"

"She's the same relation to me that I am to you; in fact,

she's a far-away connection of your own. She's a plain body, taken up with her hens and her dairy,—indeed, for the matter of that, she manages the whole farm."

"A sort of Mrs Poyser?"

"I don't know *her*."

"Not know Mrs Poyser? Oh, you must let me read you about her. We shall finish that story in the *Sunday at Home* this evening, and to-morrow we will begin Mrs Poyser. It's a capital story, and I should dearly like your opinion of it."

Rachel had not much faith in the attractions of any story recommended by Mona; but, if it was about a farmer's wife, it must surely be at least comprehensible, and probably more or less interesting.

The next morning Mona was alone in the shop. Her fairy fingers had wrought a wonderful change in her surroundings, but it seemed to her now in her depression that she might better have let things alone. "Oh, reform it altogether!" she said bitterly. "What's the use of patching—*what's the use?*"

The shop-bell rang sharply, and Dr Dudley came in. It was a relief to see some one quite different from the people with whom her social intercourse had lain of late.

"Good morning," he said. "How are you?"

"Good morning," said Mona.

She ignored his offered hand, but she was surprised to hear herself answering unconventionally.

"I am bored," she said, "to the last limit of endurance."

He drew down his brows with a frown of sympathy.

"Are you?" he said. "What do you do for it?"

"I do believe he is going to recommend Easton's Syrup!" thought Mona.

"Ah, that's the trouble," she said. "I am not young enough to write a tragedy, so there is nothing for it but to grin and bear it."

"You ought to go out for a regular spin," he said kindly. "There's nothing like that for blowing away the cobwebs."

"I can't to-day, but to-morrow I am going for a twenty-mile walk along the coast"—"botanising," she was about to add, but she thought better of it.

"Don't overdo it," he said. "If you are not in training, twenty miles is too much," and his eye rested admiringly on her figure, as the Sahib's had done only a fortnight before. He was thinking that if his aunt's horse were less fat, and her carriage less heavy, and the world constructed on different principles generally, he would like nothing better than to take this bright young girl for a good rattle across the county.

"I think I am in pretty fair training, thank you. Can I show you anything this morning?" For Mona wished it to be understood that no young man was at liberty to drop into the shop for the sole purpose of gossip.

He sighed. "What have you got that is in the least likely to be of the smallest use to me at any future period of my life?" he felt half inclined to say; but instead, he bought some pens—which he certainly did not want—and showed no sign of going.

"My dear," called Rachel's anxious voice, "come here quick, will you? Sally has cut her finger to the bone!"

"Allow me," said Dr Dudley, taking a neat little surgical case from his pocket. "That is more in my line than yours, I think," and he hastily left the room.

"*Is* it indeed!" said Mona saucily to herself, drawing the counterpart of his case from her own pocket. "Set you up!"

She was about to follow him, "to hold the forceps," as she said, when the bell rang again, and two red-haired, showily-dressed girls entered the shop. They seemed surprised to see Mona there, and looked at her critically.

"Some blue ribbon," said one of them languidly, with a comical affectation of *hauteur*.

Mona laid the box on the counter, and they ran their eyes over the poor little store.

"No, there is nothing there that will do."

Mona bowed, and replaced the box on the shelf.

"You don't mean to say that is all you've got! Why, it is not even fresh. Some of it is half faded."

"Truly," said Mona quietly. "I suppose you will be able to get what you want elsewhere."

"I told you it was no use, Matilda, in a place like this," said the elder of the two, looking contemptuously round the shop. "Pa will be driving us in to St Rules in a day or two. There are some decent shops there."

"What is the use of that when I want it to-night? Just let me see the box again."

She took up the least impossible roll of ribbon and regarded it critically.

"You can't possibly take that, Matilda. Every shop-girl wears that shade."

Matilda nudged her sister violently, and they both strove to prevent a giggle from getting the better of their dignity. Fortunately, when they looked at Mona, she seemed to be quite unconscious of this little by-play. The younger was the first to recover herself.

"I will take two yards of that," she said, trying to make up for her momentary lapse by increased formality, and she threw half-a-sovereign on the counter, without enquiring the price.

Mona had just given her the parcel and the change, when Rachel came in full of obsequious interest, and enquiries about "your pa" and "your ma"; so Mona withdrew to the other side of the shop.

"I see you have got a new assistant, Miss Simpson," said Matilda patronisingly.

"I'm happy to say I have,—a relation of my own, too,—Miss Maclean."

Rachel meant it for an informal introduction, but Mona did not raise her eyes from the wools she was arranging.

"You will be glad to hear that the wound is a very trifling one," said Dr Dudley's pleasant voice a moment later, as he re-entered the shop and walked straight up to Mona. "Good

morning." In spite of his previous rebuff, he held out his hand cordially, and, although Mona was somewhat amused, she appreciated the kindness of his motive too warmly to refuse his hand again.

And indeed it was a pleasant hand to take—firm, "live," brotherly, non-aggressive.

But she responded to his salutation with a very audible, "Good morning, *sir*."

"Damnation!" he said to himself, "the girl is as proud as Lucifer. She might have left the 'sir' alone for once."

From which you will perceive that Dr Dudley had heard something of the conversation which had just taken place, had guessed a little more, and had resolved in a very friendly spirit to play the part of a *deus ex machinâ*.

He went out of the shop in company with the red-haired girls.

"Do you know that young woman is a relation of Miss Simpson's?" asked one of them.

"I do."

"She might be a duchess from the airs she gives herself," said the other.

Dr Dudley was silent. It would be a gratuitous exaggeration to say that Mona would grace that or any other position, although the contrast she presented to these two girls made him feel strongly inclined to do so; and in any case it was always a mistake to show one's hand.

"Well, you needn't have said that about shop-girls all the same," said Matilda.

"I don't care! It would do her good to be taken down a peg."

"Ah, Miss Cookson," said Dr Dudley, thankfully seizing his opportunity, "don't you think it is dangerous work trying to take people down a peg? It requires such a delicate hand, that I never attempt it myself. One is so very apt to take one's self down instead."

He lifted his hat with a short "Good morning," and strode away in the opposite direction.

"Where were your eyes?" said Rachel, when the customers had left the shop. "Miss Cookson was going to shake hands with you, I believe; and they're the richest people in Borrowness."

"Thank you very much, dear," replied Mona quietly, "but one must draw the line somewhere. If our customers have less manners than Mrs Sanderson's pig, I will serve them to the best of my ability, but I must decline the honour of their personal acquaintance."

This explanation was intended mainly as a quiet snub to Rachel. In the life at Borrowness, nothing tried Mona more sorely than the way in which her cousin truckled to every one whom she considered her social superior; and it was almost unavoidable that Mona herself should be driven to the opposite extreme in her morbid resolution that no one should consider her guilty of the same meanness. "I don't suppose for a moment that those girls would bow to Rachel in the streets of St Rules," she thought. "Why can she not be content to look upon them as customers and nothing more?"

Poor Mona! She was certainly learning something of the seamiest side of the "wide, puzzling subject of compromise." Hitherto she had been responsible for herself alone, and so had lived simply and frankly; but now a thousand petty considerations were forced upon her in spite of herself, because she felt responsible for her cousin too.

"Well, they do say the Cooksons are conceited and stiff," said Rachel, "but they're always pleasant enough to me."

She found considerable satisfaction afterwards, however, in detailing to one of her friends how Mona had taken the bull by the horns, and had attributed the stiffness on which the Cooksons so prided themselves to simple want of manners. She felt as the people did in Hans Andersen's story when the first voice had found courage to say, "But he has got nothing on!" and she never again absolutely grovelled before the Cooksons.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BOTANISTS.

Immediately after breakfast the next morning, Mona slung her vasculum over her shoulder, strapped a business-like spud round her waist, tucked a well-worn *Hooker* under her arm, and set off at a good brisk pace. Contrary to all expectations, the rain still held off; and, as physical exercise brought the blood to her face, the clouds of her depression rolled away like mountain mists in the sunshine.

She kept to the highroad for the first few miles, and then, when she was well past the haunts of men, struck on to the glorious, undulating, sandy dunes.

Botanising was not very easy work now, for most of the plants were in fruit, and sometimes not even the youngest member of an inflorescence persisted, as a pale stray floret, to proclaim the pedigree of its family. But Mona was no tyro in the work, and her vasculum filled up steadily. Moreover, she was not disposed to quarrel with anything to-day, and when she reached the extreme easterly point of the county, and stood all alone at the water's edge, she felt the same sense of exultation and proprietorship that she had experienced on the wild pack-horse track above the Nærodal.

All at once her eye caught sight of some showy purple blossoms. "Eldorado yo he trovado!" she cried. "I verily believe it is a sea-rocket." She transferred it to her vasculum, and seated herself on a rock for a few minutes' rest. She proceeded to undo her packet of sandwiches, singing to herself all the time, as was her habit when light-hearted and quite alone; but the words that came into her head were not always so appropriate as on the occasion of her first visit to the beach; and at the present moment she was proclaiming with all the emphasis befitting a second encore—

"Fo—r he's going to marry Yum-Yum"—

when a sudden intuition made her look round, and, to her horror, she saw two men regarding her with an amused smile.

One was elderly, ruddy, and commonplace; the other was young, sallow, mournful, and interesting. Both carried vasculums a good deal more battered and weather-beaten than Mona's own.

She coloured up to the roots of her hair, and then made the best of the situation, laughing quietly, and proceeding with her sandwiches the while.

The ruddy man lifted his hat with a friendly bow. "But for the nineteenth-century character of your song," he said, "I should have taken you for the nymph of the coast."

"In a go-ahead county like this," said Mona gravely, returning his bow, "even the nymph of the coast is expected to keep pace with the times."

"True," he said. "I had forgotten where I was. Has the nymph of the coast got anything interesting in her vasculum?"

"Nothing really rare, I fear, though I have found a good deal that is new to me. Oh, by the way, I found a plant of penny-cress in some waste ground near Kilwinnie. Is that common here?"

"*Thlaspi arvense?*" he said sceptically, looking at his sallow companion.

The younger man shook his head. "I never saw it in the neighbourhood," he said.

"I am quite open to conviction, of course," said Mona, and, rummaging in her vasculum, she produced a bunch of large, flat, green "pennies."

"Right," chuckled the elder man triumphantly — "see that?"

"Y-e-s. It's curious I never saw it before—and near Kilwinnie, too. But it seems all right; it is not likely to be a garden escape."

And they proceeded to compare specimens with much interest and enthusiasm.

"We intended to go on a little farther," said the elderly gentleman at last. "As you are botanising also, perhaps you will join us?"

Mona assented gladly, and they walked together a few miles along the coast, before turning back towards Kilwinnie.

"I suppose you have done no microscopic botany?" said her friend suddenly.

This, from Rachel's point of view, was approaching dangerous ground; but she was never likely to see these men again. They did not look like natives.

"Yes, I have done a little," said Mona. "I have attended a botany class."

"Indeed! May I ask where?"

"In London"—and as he still looked at her enquiringly, "at University College," she added.

"*Oh!* Then you *have* studied botany! But they did not teach you there to spot *Thlaspi arvense?*"

"No; I taught myself that before I began to study botany. I think it is a pity that that part of the subject is so much ignored."

"But botany, as taught at present, is much more scientific. Old-fashioned botany—especially as taught to ladies—was a happy combination of pedestrianism and glorified stamp-collecting."

"True," said Mona, "and if one had to choose between the old and the new, one would choose the new without a moment's hesitation; but, on the other hand, it does give the enemy occasion to blaspheme, when a man can tell them that a flower is composite, proterandrous, syngenesious, &c., but when he is quite unable to designate it by its simple name of dandelion."

Both the men laughed.

When they reached Kilwinnie, the elder of the two stopped and held out his hand.

"I am sorry we cannot offer to see you home," he said; "but the fact is, dinner is waiting for me now at the inn,

and I start for London to-night. If you are ever in town again, my wife and I will be only too pleased to see you," and he handed her his card.

He did not ask her name, for the simple reason that he had already seen it in the beginning of her *Flora*.

When Mona looked at the card, she found that she had been spending the afternoon with a scientist of European celebrity.

"If redbeard be that," she said, "what must blackbeard be, and why did he not give me his card too?"

She walked on at a good pace, realising only when she saw the lights of Kirkstoun, how dark it had grown. As she passed the post-office, she saw a knot of men assembled at the counter; for, in an unobtrusive way, the Kirkstoun post-office — which was also a flourishing grocer's shop — served many of the purposes of a club. This it did the more effectually as the only female assistant was a wrinkled and spiteful old woman, whose virgin ears could not be injured by any ordinary masculine gossip.

Scarcely had Mona left this *rendezvous* behind her when she was overtaken by Dr Dudley.

"You are very late," he said simply.

"Yes, but I have had a glorious time."

"You are tired?"

"Healthily tired."

"Cobwebs all gone?"

"Oh yes! In fact, they had begun to go when I saw you yesterday, or I could not have spoken of them."

"Poor little soul!" he thought to himself, wondering how she escaped melancholia in the narrow limits of her life.

"You did not really mind those vulgar girls yesterday," he went on awkwardly, after a pause.

For a moment she could not think what he was referring to.

"Oh no!" she said at last, with wide-open eyes of wonder. "How could I? They don't come into my world

at all. Neither their opinion of me, nor their want of manners, can possibly affect me."

"That is certainly the sensible way to look at it."

"I don't know, after all, whether it is the right way. Probably their vulgarity is all on the surface. I believe there are thousands of girls like that who only want some large-souled woman to take them by the hand, and draw out their own womanhood. How can they help it if their life has been barren of ideals?"

He made a mental survey of the women in the neighbourhood, in search of some one capable of performing such a function.

"What a pity it is that they cannot see *you* as you are," he said, looking at the dim outline of her face. "Large-souled women do not grow on every hedge."

"Perhaps it would be more to the purpose if I could see myself as they see me," she answered thoughtfully. "After all, with the honestest intentions, we scan our lives as we do our own poetry, laying stress on the right syllables, and passing lightly over a halting foot. You force me to confess that I said some very ill-natured things about those girls after they were gone; and I had not their excuse of being still in the chrysalis stage. They may make better butterflies than I yet. Even a woman can never tell how a girl is going to turn out."

He laughed. "What is bred in the bone—" he said, "Their mother is my ideal of all that is vulgar and pretentious."

"Poor children!" said Mona.

"And the best of it is," he said, "that she began life as a small——"

He stopped short and the blood rushed over his face.

"Well," said Mona quietly, "as a what?"

"*Milliner*," he said, kicking a stone violently out of his way, in a tempest of anger at his own stupidity.

"You don't mean to say," said Mona, "that you were afraid of hurting my feelings? Oh, please give me credit for having the soul of a human being!"

He walked with her to her own door that night. It was after dark, to be sure, but I am inclined to think that he might have done the same had it been noonday; and when he got home he asked his aunt no more questions about "Miss Simpson's niece."

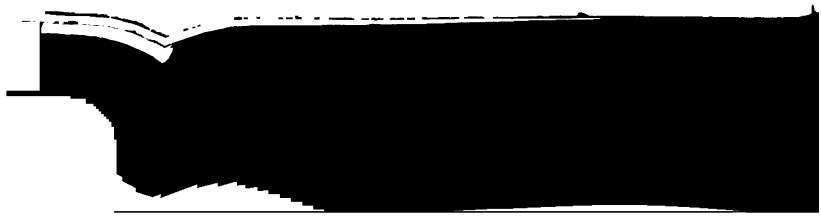
CHAPTER XVI.

"JOHN HOGG'S MACHINE."

"He is curiously *simpatico*," said Mona to herself the next morning. "I don't know that I ever knew any one with whom I felt less necessity for clearing up my fog-beswathed utterances, or for breaking down my brilliant metaphors in milk; it is pleasant to be able to walk straight off into the eternals with somebody; but I like a man to be more of a healthy animal." And a sunshiny memory passed through her mind of the "moral Antiseptic," the dear brotherly Sahib.

"I wonder who the other botanist was?" she went on presently, tumbling her pillows into a more comfortable position. "The Professor's assistant perhaps, or possibly a professor himself. He certainly was a scientist, every inch of him, from his silent tongue to the tips of his ill-groomed fingers."

It would have surprised her not a little if she could have seen the subject of her speculations an hour or so later. He was sitting behind the counter of a draper's shop in Kilwinnie, his head resting on his hand in an attitude of the deepest dejection. Mona was perfectly right when she declared him to be every inch a scientist; he was more so perhaps than even the great Professor himself: but the lines had fallen unto him in a narrow little world, where his studies were looked upon as mere vagaries, on a par with kite-



making and bullet-casting; where his college classes at St Rules had to be paid for out of his own carefully saved pocket-money; where his experiments and researches had to be conducted in a tumble-down summer-house at the foot of the old garden; and where, at the age of twenty, he was left an orphan with four grown-up sisters to support.

Had they all lived thirty years later, or in a less secluded part of the world, the sisters would probably have looked out for themselves, and have left their brother to make a great name, or to starve in a garret over his weeds and his beetles, according as the Fates might decree; but such an idea never occurred to any one of the five, although the sisters had all received sufficient instruction in music, painting, and French, to make them rather hard to please in the matter of husbands.

The lad was cut out for patient, laborious, scientific research, and he knew it; but with four sisters on one's hands, and a balance at the bank scarcely large enough to meet doctor's bills and funeral expenses, scientific research seems sadly vague and indefinite, while a well-established drapery business is at least "something to lippen to."

So he laid aside his plans, and took up the yardstick as a mere matter of course, without any posing and protestations even to himself.

He so far asserted himself, that the microscope, the *hortus siccus*, and the neat pine-wood cabinets, took up a place of honour in the house, instead of skulking in out-of-the-way corners; but now that fifteen years had passed away, although he was known to all the initiated as the greatest living authority on the fauna and flora of the eastern part of the county, he was beginning to pursue his hobby at rarer intervals and in a more dilettante spirit. Now and then when some great scientist came into the neighbourhood, and appealed to him as to the habitat of this and as to the probable extinction of that, when his personal convoy on an expedition was looked upon as an honour and a great piece of luck, when in the course of walks round the coast he

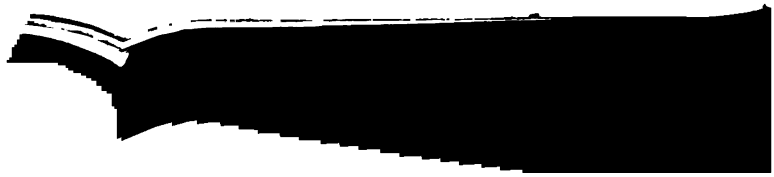
drank in the new theories of which the scientific world was talking, he felt some return of the old fire; but in the main, to the great relief of his sisters, he was settling down into a good and useful burgher, with a place on the town council and on sundry local boards, with an excellent prospect of the provostship, and with no time for such frivolities as butterfly-hunting and botanising.

When his acquaintances questioned him, he always stated his conviction that he had chosen, on the whole, the better part; but he never gave any account of hours like the present, in which he loathed the very thought of civic honours and dignity, and in which he painted to himself in glowing colours the life that might have been.

He was thinking much just now of the burly old professor whose visit he had keenly enjoyed; and more even than of the professor he was thinking of Mona Maclean. All things are relative in life. Scores of men had met Mona who had scarcely looked at her a second time. She might be nothing and nobody in the great bright world of London; but into this man's dark and lonely life she had come like a meteor. He could scarcely have told what it was that had fascinated him. It was partly her bright young face, though he dreaded good-looking women; partly her light-hearted song, though he scorned frivolous women; partly her botany, though he laughed at learned women; and partly her frank outspoken manner, though he hated forward women. She bore no smallest resemblance to the mental picture that had sometimes floated vaguely before him of a possible helpmeet for him; and yet, and yet—look where he would, he could see her sitting on that rock, with all the light of the dancing waves in her eyes,—the veritable spirit of the coast as the professor had said. He even found himself trying to hum in a very uncertain bass,

"For he's going to marry Yum-Yum;"

but this was a *reductio ad absurdum*, and with a heavy frown he proceeded to make out some bills.



It never occurred to him to question that she was far out of his reach. Anybody, he thought, could see at a glance that she was a lady, in a different sense from that in which his sisters bore the name. It was right and fitting that the great professor should give her his card, but who was he—the draper of Kilwinnie—that he should suggest another meeting?

But the second meeting was nearer than either he or Mona anticipated.

"We're going to take tea with Auntie Bell this afternoon," said Rachel next day. "Mr Hogg is going in to Kilwinnie on business, and he says if we don't mind waiting half an hour in the town, he will drive us on to Balbirnie. I want to buy a couple of mats at Mr Brown's; you can depend on the quality there better than anywhere here or in Kirkstoun; and we'll just wait in the shop till Mr Hogg is ready."

"But can he spare the time?" asked Mona uneasily. She knew that Rachel could quite well afford to hire a trap now and then.

"Oh, he's always glad to have a crack with Auntie Bell, not to say a taste of her scones and cream. She is a great hand at scones."

This was magnanimous on Rachel's part, for her own scones were tough and heavy, and—though that, of course, she did not know—constituted one of the minor trials of Mona's life.

"But, dear," said Mona, "we are neglecting the shop dreadfully between us."

"Oh, Sally can mind it all right when she's cleaned herself in the afternoon. She is only too glad of a gossip with anybody. It is not as if it was for a constancy like; this is our last call in the meantime. Now the folks will begin to call on us, and some of them will ask us to tea."

Mona tried to smile cordially, but the prospect was not entrancing.

About half-past two, Mr Hogg came round in his "machine." Now "machine," as we all know, is a radical

and levelling word, and in this case it was a question of levelling up, not of levelling down, for Mr Hogg's machine was simply a tradesman's cart. It was small, to be sure, and fairly new and fresh, and nicely varnished, but no one could look at it and doubt that it was what Lucy would have called a "common or garden" cart. Rachel and Mona got in with some difficulty, and they started off along the Kirkstoun road. Here they met Dr Dudley. His short-sighted eyes would never have recognised them had not Rachel leaned forward and bowed effusively; then he lifted his hat and passed on.

They rattled through the streets of Kirkstoun, past the post-office, the tannery, the Baptist chapel, and other buildings of importance; and then drove out to Kilwinnie, where Mr Hogg politely deposited them at Mr Brown's door.

Here, then, Mona saw her "professor" measuring out a dress length of lilac print for a waiting servant-girl, and here the draper saw his fairy princess, his spirit of the coast, alighting with as much grace as possible from John Hogg's cart.

Mr Brown knew Rachel Simpson. She stopped occasionally to purchase something from him on her way to Auntie Bell's; his sisters often amused themselves by laughing at her dress, and the traveller told him comical stories about the way in which she kept shop.

For it must be clearly understood that Mr Brown's shop was a very different thing from Rachel Simpson's. It was well stocked with substantial goods, and was patronised by all the people round about who really respected themselves. It was no place for "bargains" in the modern sense of the word. It was a commercial eddy left behind by the tide in days when things were expected to wash and to wear. There was no question here of "locking the door, and letting folks see that you did not require to keep the shop." A place like this must, on the face of it, be the chief aim and end of somebody's existence.

Rachel's descent from the cart was a somewhat tedious

process, but at length it was accomplished successfully, and Mr Hogg drove away, promising to return for them in half an hour.

Poor Rachel was not a little flattered by the draper's cordial greeting. Leaving the "young man" to do up the print, he came forward, with stammering, uncertain words indeed, but with a beaming smile and outstretched hand. And he might be Provost next year!

"This is my cousin, Miss Maclean," she said.

Mr Brown looked absolutely petrified.

"I think we have met before," said Mona, not a little surprised herself, taking his offered hand. "This is one of the gentlemen, dear, who helped me with my plants."

"Oh," said Rachel rather blankly.

It had required all her "manners" to keep her from giving Mona a candid opinion of the common weeds which were the sole fruit of a long day's ramble, and Rachel had a very poor opinion of any *man* who could occupy himself with such trash. But, to be sure, he was a good draper—and he might be Provost next year!

And then he was so very cordial and friendly—that in itself would have covered a multitude of sins. As soon as Rachel had made up her mind about the mats, he hastened up-stairs, and returned with a stammering invitation from his sisters. Would Miss Simpson and her cousin come up to the drawing-room and wait there? When Mona came to know a little more of the Brown *ménage*, she wondered how in the world he had ever succeeded in getting that invitation.

But up-stairs they went, and were graciously received by the sisters. Mr Brown was wildly happy, and utterly unable to show himself to any advantage. He wandered aimlessly about, showing Mona this and that, and striving vainly to utter a single sentence consecutively.

"Can't you have tea?" he said in a stage-whisper to his sister.

"Oh, thank you," interposed Rachel with a somewhat oleaginous smile, "it's very kind, I'm sure, but we're on

our way to Mrs Easson's, and we won't spoil our appetites."

"Are you going to be here long?" said the draper to Mona.

"At Borrowness? A few months, I expect."

"Then you'll be doing some more botanising?"

"Oh yes."

"There's some very nice things a little bit farther round the coast than we went the other day. Would you come some time with my sister and me?"

"I should be very glad indeed," said Mona warmly. "It is an immense advantage to go with some one who knows the neighbourhood."

"Well, we will arrange the day—later on," and he sighed; "but it won't do to wait too long now."

At this moment Mr Hogg rattled up to the door, and the draper went down and helped his visitors into the cart.

"Why, I declare he's getting to be quite a lady's man," said Rachel when they were well out of hearing. "I wonder what his sisters would say if he was to get married after all."

Meanwhile the Browns discussed their visitors.

"It's last year's mantle," said Number one, "but the bonnet's new."

"And what a bonnet!" said Number two.

"And she still shows two or three good inches of red wrist between her glove and her sleeve," said Number three. "Nobody would think that girl was her cousin."

"She's not at all pretty," said Number four, "but she's quite ladylike. Do you know what she is, Philip?"

"I don't," he said nervously, "but I fancy she must be a teacher or something of that kind. She has been very well educated."

"Ah, that would account for it," said Number two. "It must be a nice change for her to come and stay with Miss Simpson."

The draper stood at the window counting up his happiness. There was not a snobbish line in his nature, and Mona was

not any the less a fairy princess in his eyes because she seemed suddenly to have come within his reach. He knew his sisters did not want him to marry, and he was grateful to them now for having crushed in the bud certain little fancies in the past; but if he once made up his mind,—he laughed to himself as he thought how little their remonstrances would weigh with him. Of course there was a great chance that so bright and so clever a girl might refuse him; but fifteen years of his sisters' influence had not taught him to exaggerate this probability, and in that part of the country there is a strong superstition to the effect that a woman teacher is not likely to refuse what is commonly known as "an honest man's love."

CHAPTER XVII.

AUNTIE BELL.

The slanting rays of the afternoon sun were throwing the old farmhouse, with its goodly barns and well-built stacks, into mellow lights and warm brown shadows, when Mr Hogg's pony drew up at the garden-gate. Before they had time to get down, Auntie Bell came out to greet them,—such a queer little woman, bent half double, and peering up at her visitors through her gold spectacles with keen expressive eyes. There was force of character in every line of her face and figure, even in the dowdy cap, the grey wincey gown, and snow-white apron.

"Why, it's Rachel Simpson," she said. "Come awa' ben. Dick 'll tak' the powny."

"This is my cousin, Miss Maclean," said Rachel.

"Mona Maclean," corrected the owner of the name.

Auntie Bell gripped her hand and studied her face with as

little regard to her feelings as if she had been a horse or a cow, the furrow on her own brow deepening the while.

"Eh, but she's like her faither," she said. "The mooth an' the chin——"

"Yes," said Rachel shortly. The subject of Mona's father was not a congenial one.

"What w'y are ye no' mairrit yet?" continued Auntie Bell severely, still maintaining her grasp of Mona's hand.

"'Advanced women don't marry, sir, she said,'" were the first words that passed through Mona's mind, but she paraphrased them. "We don't marry now," she said. "It's gone out of fashion."

The muscles of Auntie Bell's face relaxed.

"Hoot awa'," she said. "Wait ye till a braw young man comes alang——"

"You will dance at my wedding then, won't you?"

"That will I!" and Auntie Bell executed a momentary *pas seul* on the spot.

She stopped abruptly and drew down her brows with all her former gravity.

"I hope ye're cliver," she said.

"Thank you. As folks go nowadays, I think I am pretty fair."

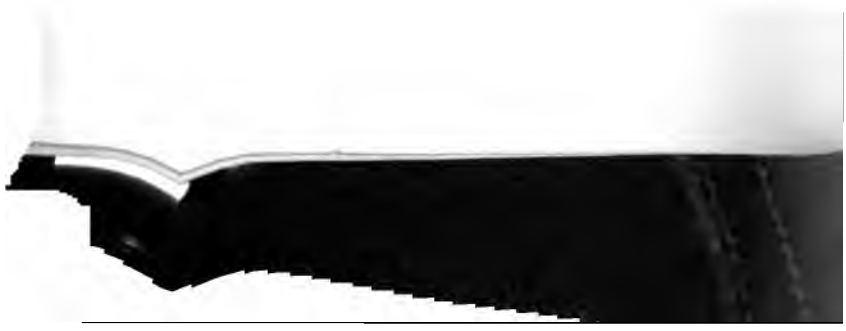
"Ye had need be, wi' a faither like yon."

"Ah," said Mona with sudden gravity, "I was not thinking of him. I am not clever as he was."

"Na, na, I was thinkin' that. He was"—this with great emphasis—"as fine a mon as iver I saw."

"But did you know him? I did not know that he was ever in this part of the country."

"Ay was he! He cam' ae day, it may be five-an'-twinty year syne—afore there was ony word o' you, maybe. He was keen to see the hoose whaur his faither was born, and we'd a crack aboot the auld folks, him and me. Rachel Simpson was at Dundee than. My word! ye'd hae thocht I'd been the finest leddy at the Towers. But come awa' ben, an' I'll mask the tea."



"Ye'll find the place in an awfu' disorder," she went on to Rachel as they entered the spotless parlour. "I'm that hadden doon o' the hairvest, I've no' got my back strauchten'd up sin' it commenced;" and she bustled in and out of the kitchen getting the tea.

"You don't let the girls do enough," said Rachel.

"The lassies! Hoot awa'. I canna bide their slatternly w'ys i' the hoose. I'm best pleased when they're oot-bye."

"You havena been to see me for many a long day."

"Me! I've no' been onywhere; I've no' seen onybody. I've no' been to the kirk sin' I canna tell ye whan. What w'y would I? The folk wad a' be lauchin' at daft auld Auntie Bell wi' her bent back. The meenister was here seein' me. He cam' that day o' the awfu' rain, his umberella wrang side oot, an' his face blue wi' the cauld—ye ken what a thin, feckless body he is. 'Come awa', ye puir cratur,' says I, 'come awa' ben tae the fire.' An' he draws himsel' up, an' says he, 'Why say, poor creature?'—like that, ye ken—'why say, poor creature?'" And Auntie Bell clapped her hand on her knee, and laughed at the recollection.

At this moment Mr Hogg and Auntie Bell's husband—a person of no great account—passed the window on their way into the house.

"Come awa' tae yer tea, Mr Hogg. Hoot, Dauvid, awa' an' pit on anither coat. Ye're no' fit tae speak tae the leddies."

David meekly withdrew.

"We were in seeing the Browns," said Rachel complacently. "They were wanting us to stay to tea."

"Ay! I've no' seen them this mony a day."

"How is he getting on, do you know, in the way of business?" asked Mr Hogg.

Auntie Bell brought the palm of her hand emphatically down on the table.

"A' thing i' that shop is guid," she said. "I'm perfectly convinced o' that; but ye can get things a deal cheaper i' the toon nor ye can wi' Maister Brown, an' folks think o'

naething but that. I aye deal wi' him mysel'. He hasna just a gift for the shop-keepin', but he's been mair wise-like lately, less taen up wi' his butterflies an' things."

Before her visitors had finished tea, Auntie Bell was hard at work, in spite of a mild remonstrance from Rachel, packing a fat duck and some new-laid eggs for them to take home with them. Something of the kind was the invariable termination of Rachel's visits, but she would not have thought it "manners" to accept the basket without a good deal of pressing.

Mr Hogg was beginning to get impatient before the "ladies" rose to go.

"I'll see ye intae the cairt," said Auntie Bell to Mona, when the first farewells had been said. "Rachel 'll come whan she gits on her bannet."

As soon as they were in the garden, the old woman laid her hand impressively on Mona's arm.

"Are ye onything weel pit up wi' Rachel?" she whispered.

"Oh yes, indeed."

Auntie Bell shook her head. "It's no' the place for the like o' you," she said, and then further conversation was prevented by Miss Simpson's appearance.

"Well, you'll be in to see us soon," she said.

"Eh, I daursay you'll be here again first."

"*I* will, certainly," said Mona. "I mean to walk out and see you some day."

"Hoot awa', lassie. It's ower far. Ye canna walk frae Borrowness. Tak' the train——"

"Can't I?" laughed Mona, as Mr Hogg drove off.

"Why, why, *why*," she thought as they trotted down to Kilwinnie, "did not the Fates give me Auntie Bell for my hostess instead of Rachel Simpson?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

A SILHOUETTE.

About a week after Mona's visit to Auntie Bell, Dr Dudley was sitting alone in the dining-room at Carlton Lodge. It was nearly midnight, and a terrific storm was raging outside. One of the great trees at the foot of the garden had been blown down into the road, carrying with it a piece of the wall; and the wind roared round the lonely house like a volley of artillery.

Within, a bright wood-fire was reflected dimly on the oak wainscot, and a shaded lamp threw a brilliant light on scattered books and papers, shrouding the rest of the room in suggestive shadows.

Dr Dudley rose to his feet, and kicked a footstool across the room. You would scarcely have recognised his face as the one that had smiled at Mona across the counter. The wind played on his nerves as if they had been an instrument, but he was not thinking of the storm.

"Three years more before I can begin to do a man's work in the world," he said, "and nearly thirty lie behind me! It is enough to make one make tracks for the gold-fields to-morrow. What surety have I that all my life won't drift, drift, drift away, as the last thirty years have done? Upon my soul"—he drew up the blind and looked out on the darkness, which only threw back his image and that of the room—"I envy the poor devils who are called out to their patients in this tempest, for shilling or half-crown fees!"

He was young, you see, but not very young; for, instead of indulging in further heroics, he bit his lip and returned to his books and papers. "*Hier oder nirgends ist Amerika!*" He drew down his brows, and read aloud from the mighty tome at his side, stopping now and then to add a few lines to the diagram before him.

He held very strongly that, in addition to practical work, which was wellnigh everything, there was only one way of mastering anything approaching an exact science. Firstly, get the best handbook extant; secondly, read the diagrams only; thirdly, read the diagrams, letterpress and all; fourthly, read letterpress alone, constructing your own diagrams as you go. "For after all," he said, "another man's diagrams are but crutches at the best. It is only when you have assimilated a subject, and projected it again though the medium of your own temperament, that it is of any practical use to you, or indeed has any actual existence for you personally."

His opinion ought to have been of some value, for the study of an exact science was by no means the work for which his mind was best fitted; and it is not those whom Nature has endowed with a "royal road" to the attainment of any subject who are best able to direct their fellows.

The clock was striking two when he closed his books and extinguished the lamp. It was not his custom to work so late; he was oddly rational in such ways; but he had learned by experience that to act on the principle that "*Hier oder nirgends ist Amerika*" was the only cure—sometimes, alas! not a very effectual one—for moods of depression and bitter self-reproach.

The hurricane had raged for several days, but next morning the sun shone down on a smiling innocent world, with a pleasant suggestion of eternal renewal.

"I am going for a long drive past Kilwinnie," said Mrs Hamilton at lunch. "I am perishing for lack of fresh air; and I want you to go with me, Ralph."

"I am sorry I can't," he said shortly. It must be confessed that Dr Dudley was a man of moods.

"Oh, nonsense, Ralph! You have poked over those horrid books for days. You refused to come the last time I asked you, and that was centuries ago, before the storm began. I can't have you always saying 'No.'"

"It is a pity I did not learn to say 'No' a little earlier in life," he said gloomily; and then, with a dismal sense that the old lady was mainly dependent on him for moral sunshine, he got up and laid his hand on her shoulder—

> "'I have been the sluggard, and must ride apace,
> For now there is a lion in the way,'"

he said, striving to speak cheerfully.

"I declare, Ralph, any one would think, to hear you talk, that you were a worn-out *roué*. What would have become of me for the last two years if you had been in busy practice? You know quite well that one might walk from Land's End to John o' Groat's in search of your equal in general culture. Professor Anderson was saying to me only the other day that it was impossible to find you tripping. Whether the conversation turned on some unheard-of lake in Central Africa, or the philosophy of Hegel, or Coptic hymnology, or Cistercian hill architecture of the Transition Period, you were as much at home as if it was the weather that was under discussion. I told him he might have included the last new thing in bonnets."

"No, no," said Ralph, laughing in spite of himself. "That was too bad. You know I draw the line there. These things are too wonderful for me."

"But you will come with me, won't you?"

"You coaxing old humbug!" he said affectionately, "I suppose I must. It will only mean burning a little more of the midnight oil. What havoc you must have wrought when you were young, if you understood a man's weakness for flattery as well as you do now!"

"Ah, but I did not," she responded quietly, having gained her point. "It takes a lifetime to fathom it."

He laughed again, kissed her on the forehead, and consented to have some tart after all. People were rather at fault who thought the old aunt poor company for the clever young doctor.

In due time the sleek old coachman brought round the

sleek old horse, and they set off at a quiet trot along the level highroad.

"We must stop at Kirkstoun and speak to Hutchison about getting the wall put up," said Mrs Hamilton. "Well, it is like losing an old friend to see that tree! But we shall be at no loss for firewood during the winter. We shall have some royal Yule-logs, well seasoned, to welcome you back."

"Do," he said. "There is nothing like them after meagre London fires; and you know we must make the most of my Christmas visit. If you keep pretty strong, I must not come back till midsummer, when my examination is over. It won't do to come a cropper at my time of life. Just look at that wheat!"

The harvest had promised well before the storm began, but the corn which was still uncut had been beaten down level with the ground, and the "stooks" were sodden with rain.

"Most of the corn will have to be cut with the sickle now," said the old lady. "Next Sunday won't be 'stooky Sunday' after all."

They drove on past Kilwinnie, discussing Dr Dudley's approaching departure, and the date of his return.

"Why, that surely is a strange steamer," said Mrs Hamilton suddenly. "I wonder if she has been disabled. Can you see?"

"There is no use asking me about anything that is more than a yard off," he said. "I have left my eyes at home."

She handed him a field-glass, and he studied the vessel carefully.

"I don't know her from the Ark," he said, "but that is not surprising."

Before returning the glass, he swept it half absently along the coast, and he vaguely noticed two figures—a man's figure and a woman's—stooping towards the ground.

He would have thought nothing of it, but the man's hat was off, and—standing alone as they were on the sandy

dunes — they suggested to Dudley's mind the figures in Millet's "Angelus." He laughed at the fancy, focussed the glass correctly, and looked at them again.

Just then the woman straightened herself up, and stood in silhouette against sea and sky. He would have known that lithe young form anywhere; but—all-important question —who was the man? Dudley subjected the unconscious figure to a searching examination, but in vain. To his knowledge he had never seen "the fellow" before.

Mrs Hamilton unwittingly came to his assistance. She took the glass from him, and examined the vessel herself.

"No," she said, "I don't know her at all. I expect she is coming in for repairs. Why, I believe that is Mr Brown, the draper at Kilwinnie. You know he is quite a remarkable botanist, a burning and shining light—under a bushel. I suppose that is one of his sisters with him. They say he is never seen with any other woman."

"Confound his impudence!" muttered Dudley involuntarily.

"Why, Ralph, what do you mean? You talk to me about 'the effete superstitions of an ancient gentry'; but even I have no objection to a well-conducted tradesman amusing himself with a scientific hobby in his spare time. It is a pity all young men of that class don't do the same. It would keep them out of a lot of mischief."

"Yes," said Dudley, rather vaguely.

He did not enter into any explanation of his strangely inconsistent utterance; but such silence on his part was too common an occurrence in his intercourse with his aunt to call for any remark.

Dr Dudley was not in love with Mona. It was his own firm conviction that he never would be really in love at all. All women attracted him who in any respect or in any degree approached his ideal; the devoted wife and mother, the artist, the beautiful dancer, the severe student, the capable housewife, the eloquent platform speaker,—in all of

these he saw different manifestations of the eternal idea of womanhood, and he never thought of demanding that one woman should in herself combine the characteristics of all. He was content to take each one for what she was, and to enjoy her in that capacity. He keenly appreciated the society of women; but the moment he was out of their presence—sometimes even before he was out of it—he found himself analysing them as calmly as if they were men. Yet "analyse" is scarcely the right word to use, for Dr Dudley read character less by deliberate study than by a curious power of intuition, which few would have predicated from a general knowledge of his mind and character.

Mona would have been surprised at that time had she known how much truer was his estimate of her than was that of the Sahib. Almost at the first glance, he had understood something of both her simplicity and her complexity, her reserve and her unconventionality; almost at the first interview, he had realised that, whatever might be the case in the future, at present the idea of sex simply did not exist for her. She might well call him *simpatico*. He was appreciative almost to the point of genius.

Certainly no woman had ever attracted him precisely as Mona did. She attracted him so much that he had been fain to hold his peace about her, and to wish that she were not "Miss Simpson's niece." And yet there was a pathos and a piquancy about her, in her dingy surroundings, which were not without their charm, and which appealed to a latent sense of the fatherly in him, the very existence of which he had scarcely suspected, for Dr Dudley was essentially a college man.

"Surely, surely," he thought as he enjoyed his after-dinner cigar in his tiny smoking-room, "she would never look at that fellow. She could not be such a fool. If she had lived fifty years ago it would have been all *en règle*. She would have married him as a matter of course, and an excellent match for her too. She would in due course have 'suckled fools and chronicled small-beer,' and at the present

moment her granddaughters would be holding entrance scholarships for Newnham or Girton.

"But it's not too late for *her* yet. If only that dear old aunt of mine were not such a confounded Conservative, I would get her to pay for Miss Maclean's education. By Jove! it would be education in her case, and not mere instruction, as it is with most of the learned women one meets; but even if my old lady had the money to spare, she would infinitely rather give Miss Maclean her linen and her best bedroom furniture, and bestow her with a blessing on the draper!"

It did not occur to him to doubt that Mona was practically a fixture at Borrowness. His aunt had certainly spoken as if she were, on the one occasion when Mona had been mentioned between them. In truth, the old lady had taken for granted that he was referring to the real original niece, of whose departure for America she had never even heard; and Ralph knew no one else in the neighbourhood who was at all likely to give him incidental information about Miss Simpson's assistant. She must of course have been brought up elsewhere—so much at least he could tell from her accent; and, for the rest, he had always maintained that, in these latter days, the daughters of lower middle-class people stand a better chance of a good education than any other girls in the community: it was not altogether marvellous if one in a thousand made a good use of it.

CHAPTER XIX.

"LEAVES OF GRASS."

The next day, while Mrs Hamilton was enjoying her afternoon nap, Dudley seated himself as usual with his books;

but his head ached, and he soon gave up the attempt to study.

"For every hour I work to-day, I shall waste two to-morrow," he said; and taking a volume of poetry from the shelf, he strode down to the beach.

Other people besides Mona knew of "Castle Maclean"; perhaps some people had even discovered her predilection for it. Dudley reached the spot in about half the time that she would have taken, and scrambled up the huge uneven steps. There, comfortably ensconced at the top, sat the subject of his thoughts; a sketch-book open on her lap, and a well-used, battered paint-box at her side. Dudley was too much of an artist to dabble in colours himself, but he knew one paint-box from another, and he was duly impressed.

"I beg your pardon!" he said. "So you know this place?"

"It is my private property," she said with serene dignity, very different from her bright, alert manner in the shop,—"Castle Maclean."

He bowed low. "Shall I disturb you if I stay?"

"Not in the least." She put her head on one side, and critically examined her sky. "Not unless your hat absolutely comes between me and my subject."

"Change in the weather, is not it?"

"Has it not been glorious!" she said enthusiastically, laying down her brush. "This rocky old coast was in its element. It was something to live for, to see those great waves dashing themselves into gigantic fountains of spray."

"You don't mean to say you were down here?"

"Every minute that I could spare. Why not? A wetting does one no harm in a primitive world like this."

She glanced at his book and went on with her painting. Neither of them had come there to talk, and why should they feel called upon to do it?

"This is scarcely a lady's book," he said,—though he would not have thought this remark necessary to a "Girton

girl,"—"but, if I may, I think I could find one or two things that you might like to hear."

She smiled, well pleased. She had not forgotten how

"Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul,"

had rolled out in his musical bass.

He read on for half an hour or so. Mona soon forgot her sketch and sat listening, her head resting on her hand.

He closed the book abruptly; he wanted no verbal thanks.

"And now," he said, "for my reward. May I look at your sketches?"

She coloured awkwardly. How could she show them? The scraps from Norway, and Italy, and Saxon Switzerland, might be explained; but what of the memory sketches of "the potent, grave, and reverend signiors" who had examined her at Burlington House? What of the caricature, which had amused the whole School, of Mademoiselle Lucy undergoing a *Viva*? What of her *chef-d'œuvre*, the study of the dissecting-room?

"I promised Rachel that I would keep the dreadful secret," she said ironically to herself, "and I am not going to break my word." But it cost her an effort to refuse. Some of the sketches were, in their way, undeniably clever, and she would have enjoyed showing them to him; and, moreover, she intensely disliked laying herself open to a charge of false modesty.

"I am sorry to seem so churlish," she said, "but I would rather not show you the book."

He was surprised, but her tone was absolutely final. There was nothing more to be said.

"If you like," she said shyly, "I will pay you back in a poor counterfeit of your own coin. I will read to you, and you shall close your eyes and listen to the plash of the waves. That is one of my ideals of happiness."

She took the book from the rock and began to read; but he did not close his eyes. Her voice was not a remarkable one like his own; but it was sympathetic, and her reading

suggested much more than it expressed. He enjoyed listening to her, and he was interested in her choice of a poem; but he liked best to watch her mobile, sensitive face.

> "One effort more, my altar this bleak sand;
> That Thou, O God, my life hast lighted,
> With ray of light, steady, ineffable, vouchsafed of Thee,
> Light rare, untellable, lighting the very light,
> Beyond all signs, descriptions, languages,"—

She seemed to be repeating the words from memory, not reading them; for her eyes were fixed on the hills beyond the sea, and her face was kindled for the moment into absolute beauty. Then, for the first time, a distinct thought passed through Dudley's mind that he would like the mother of his children to have a face like that.

"She would make a man noble in spite of himself," he thought; but aloud he said—

"You knew that poem?"

"Yes."

"Did you know those I read?"

"Not all of them. I knew *Vigil Strange* and *My Captain.*"

There was silence between them for a few moments.

"Have you the smallest idea," he asked suddenly, "how you are throwing yourself away?"

She coloured, and was about to answer, but just then a gust of wind caught a page of her sketch-book, and blew it over.

She laughed, glad of an excuse for changing the subject.

"The Fates have apparently decreed," she said, "that you are to see *this* sketch," and she held it out to him.

It represented a red-cheeked, sonsy-faced girl, standing before a mirror, trying on a plain little bonnet. On all sides were suggestions of flowers and feathers, and brilliant millinery; and in the girl's round eyes was an expression of positive horror.

Beneath the picture Mona had written, "Is life worth living?"

Dudley laughed.

"That looks as if there ought to be a story connected with it," he said.

"Only a bit of one," and she gave him a somewhat cynical account of her little scullery-maid.

"I withdraw my remark," he said gravely. "You are not throwing yourself away. Would that we were all using ourselves to as much purpose!"

"Don't make me feel myself more of a fool than I do already."

"Fool! I was wishing there were a few more fools in the place to appreciate you—Ruskin for one!"

"I did try to comfort myself with recollections of Ruskin," she said, with a suspicion of tears in her laughter; "but I could only think of the bit about the crossing-sweeper and the hat with the feather."

He smiled. "You do Ruskin too much honour when you judge him by an isolated quotation," he said. "I thought that distinction was reserved for the Bible."

"But that is only the beginning of the story," said Mona. "I have had several orders since for similar bonnets—more from the mothers than from the girls themselves, I am sorry to say,—and among them the one that suggested the sketch. Have you ever seen Colonel Lawrence's quaint old housekeeper up at the wood?"

"Oh yes. Everybody knows the Colonel's Jenny."

"Her daughter went away to service some time ago, and came home to visit her mother the other day, with all her wages on her back, as Jenny expressed it,—such a poor, little, rosy-cheeked, tawdry bit of humanity! The mother marched her off to me in high dudgeon, and ordered a bonnet 'like Polly's at the Towers'; and that is exactly how the poor child looked when she tried it on. I could have found it in my heart to beg her off myself. Talk of breaking in a butterfly!"

"Yes," he said. "One is inclined to think that human butterflies should be allowed to be butterflies—till one sees them too near the candle!"

"If we knew whether it were really worth while trying to save them," said Mona, "I suppose we should indeed 'know what God and man is'; as it is, we can only act on impulse. But this little Maggie does not belong to the most puzzling class. She is a good little thing, after all. I should not wonder if she had the germ of a soul stowed away somewhere."

"She is a Maggie, is she?" he said, returning with a smile to the baby-face in the picture. "They are all Maggies here. One gets perfectly sick of the name."

"Does one?" said Mona. "Queen Margaret is a heroine of mine, and my very own saint to boot."

"Are you a Margaret?" he said. "You look like one. It is partly because the name is so beautiful that one resents that senseless 'Maggie.'"

Mona was just going to say that with her it was only an unused second name; but his face had grown very grave again, and she did not wish to jar on his mood. How little we can tell in life what actions or omissions will throw their light or shadow over our whole future!

"What right have we," he said musingly at last, "to say what is normal and what is not? How can we presume to make one ideal of virtue the standard for all? Look round the world boldly—not through the medium of tinted glass—and choose at random a dozen types. If there be a God at all, it is awful to think of His catholicity!"

Mona looked up with a smile.

"Forgive me, Miss Maclean," he said. "I have no right to talk like that."

"Why not? Is life never to be relieved by a strong picturesque statement? It takes a lot of conflicting utterances to make up a man's *Credo*. When I want neat, little, compatible sentences, I resort to my cookery-book. Did you think," she added mischievously, "that I would place you

on a pedestal with Ruskin and my Bible, and judge you by an isolated quotation?"

He laughed, and then grew suddenly grave.

"Talking," he said, is *mein Verderben*. That is why I have chosen a profession that will give me no scope for it—not that I seem likely to make much of the profession, now that it is chosen! You see—my circumstances have been peculiar, and my education has been different in some respects from that of most men." He hesitated, and then, without a word of introduction, urged by some irresistible impulse, he plunged into the story of his life. Perhaps he was anxious to see how it looked in the eyes of a capable woman; certainly he regarded Mona as a wholly exceptional being, in his intercourse with whom he was bound by no ordinary rules.

"I left school when I was sixteen," he said, "laden with prizes and medals and all that sort of thing. It was my misfortune, not my fault, that I had a good deal of money to spend on my education, and a free hand as to the spending of it. I am inclined sometimes to envy fellows whose parents leave them no voice in the matter at all.

"I went first to Edinburgh University for three years, and took my M.A. There are worse degrees in the world than an Edinburgh M.A. It means no culture, no University life, no rubbing up against one's fellow-men; but it does mean a solid foundation of all-round, useful information, which no man need despise, and which is not heavy enough to extinguish the slumbering fires of genius should they chance to lie beneath. Of course, it is impossible to tell *a priori* what will prove an *education* to any man.

"When I left Edinburgh, I announced my intention of going to Cambridge. The classical professor wanted me to go in for the classical tripos, and the mathematical professor urged me to stick to the 'eternal,' of which he believes mathematics to be the sole manifestation granted to erring humanity. But I was determined to have a go at Natural Science. There was a great deal of loose scientific talk in

the air, and people seemed to make so much of a minimum of knowledge that I fancied three years of conscientious work would take a man straight in behind the veil. I went to work enthusiastically at first, while hope was strong, more quietly later when I realised that at most I might move back the veil an inch or two, while infinity lay behind; that humanity might possibly in three hundred years accomplish what I had hoped to do in three. Of course, I might have added my infinitesimal mite of labour and research, but I was not specially fitted for it. The difficulty all my life has been to find out what I was specially fitted for. However, I took my degree."

"Tripos?" said Mona.

"Third Class," he said contemptuously. "But I was not reading for a place. And, indeed, I grew more in those three years than in any other three of my life. Possibly it was the life at Cambridge. Possibly I might have accomplished more on the plains of Thibet."

He drew a long breath. He had wellnigh forgotten who his companion was, and talked on to give vent to his feelings. After all, it mattered little if she missed a point here and there. She would grasp as much of the spirit of the story as most confessors do.

"Well, then, I travelled for a couple of years. I studied at Heidelberg, and Göttingen, and Jena. I heard good music nearly every night, and I saw all the cathedrals and picture-galleries. Then I came home, determined to choose a profession. I chose medicine, mainly for the reason I gave you, and I studied in London for the examinations of the colleges. Why did I not choose the University? Would that I had! But you see I was past the age when boys 'get up' a subject with ease, and walk through brilliant examinations; and, moreover, in spite of a popular superstition to the contrary effect, two years of travel and art, and music and philosophy, do not tend to furbish up a man's mathematics and classics and natural science.

"Six months after I began to study I loathed medicine.

To use a favourite expression here, it was neither fish, flesh, fowl, nor guid red herrin'. It was neither art, science, literature, nor philosophy. It was a hideous *pot-pourri* of all four, with a preponderating, overwhelming admixture of arrant humbug. Hitherto I had worked fairly well, but there had never been any moral value in my work. It was done *con amore*. Now. that the *amor* failed, I scarcely worked at all. I suppose it was one of Nature's revenges that, as I had gone into a profession because it demanded silent work, I talked more in those years than at any other period of my life. I read all things rather than medicine, I moved in any society rather than the medical world, but I rubbed along somehow. I passed my first examination by a fluke, and I passed the second likewise. I never was at a loss for a brilliant theory to account for erroneous facts, and with some examiners that goes a long way. When it came to preparing for my Final, I hated surgery because I had scamped my anatomy. Medicine might have shared the same fate, but I had done a good deal of physiology in Gaskell's laboratory at Cambridge—more than was necessary, in fact—for the supposed connection between physiology and medicine is a purely fictitious one. The student has to take a header blindfold from the one to the other. It is almost incredible, but when I went up for my Final in due course, I did scrape through by the skin of my teeth. If ever any man got through those three examinations without a spill on the strength of less knowledge than I did, I should like to shake that man's hand. He deserves to be congratulated.

"The next thing was to look out for a practice, or a *locum tenency;* but, before doing so, I went down to Cambridge to visit some friends. While there I saw a good deal of M'Diarmid, the Professor of Anatomy. I don't know if you ever heard of him, but if ever a man made literal dry bones live, he does. Thoroughgoing to the soles of his boots—a monument of erudition—and yet with a mind open to fresh light as regards the minutest detail."

Mona flushed crimson, but fortunately he was not looking.

This was indeed approaching dangerous ground. She was strongly inclined to think that the professor in question was one of "the potent, grave, and reverend signiors" in her sketch-book.

"It was so odd," continued Dudley. "All my life, while other men walked in shadow, I had seemed to see the light of the eternal, but in medicine I had missed it absolutely. Ah, well! one word will do for a thousand. I am afraid I wrote my 'Sorrows of Werther' once more, for the last time in this world let us hope, and then I began all over again to work for a London degree."

He stopped with an unpleasant sensation of self-consciousness. "And I wonder why I have inflicted all this on you," he said, a little coldly.

"I think it was a grand thing to do—to begin over again," said Mona. "You will make a magnificent doctor when you do take your degree, and none of those past years will be lost. You will be a famous professor yourself some day. How far have you got?"

"I passed the Matriculation almost immediately, and the Preliminary Scientific six months after. In July, I go in for my Intermediate, and two years later comes my Final. Once the Intermediate is over, a load will be taken off my mind. It is all grist that comes to one's mill after that, but it requires a little resolution to plod along side by side with mere schoolboys, as most of the students are."

"It must be an excellent thing for the schoolboys."

She was wishing with all her heart that she could tell him her story in return for his. Why had she made that absurd promise to Rachel? And what would Rachel think if she claimed permission to make an exception in Dr Dudley's favour? It was all too ridiculous, and when she began to think of it, she was inclined to wonder whether she really was the Mona Maclean who had studied medicine in London.

"Why, it is after five," said Dudley suddenly, looking at his watch.

Mona sprang to her feet, and then remembered with relief that, as Rachel was going out to tea, she need not be punctual.

"But I ought to have been in time to prevent her wearing the scarlet cap," she thought with a pang of self-reproach.

"Shall you go on with your sketch to-morrow?" asked Dudley, as they walked up to the road.

"To-morrow? No; my cousin is going to take me to St Rules."

"I thought Miss Simpson was your aunt?"

"No, she is my father's cousin—one of the very few relatives I have."

Dudley was relieved, he scarcely knew why.

"I might have known my old lady was not likely to know much about any one in the village," he thought.

"Have you never been to St Rules?" he said aloud. "That is a treat in store. Almost every stone in it has a history. But I have an appointment now with my aunt in Kirkstoun—I hate saying good-bye, don't you?"

"I do."

"I mean quite apart from the parting involved."

"Oh, quite!"

He looked at her with curious eagerness, and then held out his hand. Apparently he had no objection to that.

"Well, so long!"

"*Sans adieu!*"

Mona sighed as she re-entered the dreary little sitting-room. However freely she might let the breezes of heaven blow through the house in Rachel's absence, the rooms seemed to be as musty as ever five minutes after the windows had been shut.

The autumn evenings were growing chilly, but the white curtains, by the laws of the Medes and Persians, had to remain on duty a little longer; and great as was Mona's partiality for a good fire, the thermometer must have

registered a very low figure indeed before she could have taken refuge in Sally's kitchen—at any other time than on Saturday afternoon, immediately after the weekly cleaning.

Tea was on the table. It had stood there since five o'clock.

Mona sighed again.

"If one divides servants," she said, "into three classes—those who can be taught to obey orders in the spirit, those who can be taught to obey orders in the letter, and those who cannot be taught to obey orders at all—Sally is a bad second, with an occasional strong tendency to lapse into the third. I wish she had seen fit to lapse into the third to-night."

She pushed aside the cold buttered toast, helped herself to overdrawn tea, and glanced with a shiver at the shavings in the grate. In another moment her sorrows were forgotten. Leaning against the glass shade of the gilt clock on the mantelpiece, smiling at her across the room, stood a fair, fat, friendly budget in Lady Munro's handwriting.

"*Gaudeamus igitur!*" Mona seized the tea-cosy, tossed it up to the ceiling, and caught it again with an affectionate squeeze.

How delightful that the letter should come when she was alone! Now she could get the very maximum of enjoyment out of it. She stalked it stealthily, lest it should "vanish into thin air" before her eyes, took hold of it gingerly, examined the post-mark, smelt the faint perfume which, more than anything else, reminded her of the beautiful gracious woman in the rooms at Gloucester Place, and then opened the envelope carefully with her penknife.

She took out the contents, and arranged her three treasures on the table. Yes, there were three. They had all written. There was Sir Douglas's "My dear girl"; Lady Munro's "My darling Mona"; and Evelyn's "My very own dearest friend."

They were not clever letters at all, but they were affectionate and characteristic; and Mona laughed and cried over

them, as she sat curled up in the corner of the stiff unyielding sofa. Sir Douglas was bluff and fatherly, and to the point. Lady Munro underlined every word that she would have emphasised in speaking. "Douglas *was* so dull and *so* cross after we parted from you. In fact even now he is constantly talking of you—*constantly.*" Evelyn gave a detailed circumstantial account of all they had done since Mona had left them,—an account interspersed with many protestations of affection. "Mother and I start for Cannes almost immediately," she wrote. "Of course Father cannot be induced to leave Scotland as long as there is a bird on the moors. Write me long letters as often as ever you can. You do write such lovely letters." All three reminded Mona repeatedly of her promise to spend the whole of next summer with them somewhere.

"How good they are!" Mona kept repeating. "How good they are!"

When Mona was young, like every well-conducted schoolgirl, she had formed passionate attachments, and had nearly broken her heart when "eternal friendships" failed. "I will expect no friendship, no constancy in life," she had said. "I will remember that here I have no continuing city—even in the hearts of the people I love. I will hold life and love with a loose grasp."

And even now, when increasing years were making her more healthily human, true friendship and constancy had invariably called out a feeling of glad surprise. At every turn the world was proving kinder to her than she had dared to hope.

She was still deep in the letters when her cousin came home.

"Well," said Rachel, "I've just heard a queer thing. You know the work I had last week, teaching Mrs Robertson the stitch for that tidy? Well, she had some friends in to tea last night, and she never asked me! Did you ever hear the like of that? She thinks she's just going to get her use out of me!"

"I expect, dear," said Mona, "that the stitch proved more than she could manage after all, and she was afraid to confess it."

"Well, I never did know any one so slow at the crochet," said Rachel resentfully, releasing the wonderful red cap from its basket. "She may look for some other body to help her the next time. But we'd better take our porridge and be off to our beds, if we're going to St Rules to-morrow."

Mona read her letters once more in her own room, and then another thought asserted itself unexpectedly.

"I wish with all my heart that I could have shown him the sketch-book, and made a clean breast of it," she said to her trusty friend in the glass; "and yet"—her attitude changed—"why should he stand on a different footing from everybody else?"

The face in the glass looked back defiantly, and did not seem prepared with any answer.

CHAPTER XX.

ST RULES.

When Mona appeared at the breakfast-table next morning, Rachel regarded her with critical dissatisfaction.

"I wonder you don't get tired of that dress," she said, as she poured out the tea—from the *brown* teapot. "It's very nice of course, and as good as new, but changes are lightsome, and one would think you would sometimes prefer to wear something more youthful-like. Pity your print's at the wash."

Mona looked out of the window.

"I have another," she said, "if you think it won't rain."

"Oh no. And besides, you can take your waterproof."

"It's not so much that I mind getting anything spoiled, as that I hate to be dressed unsuitably; but I do think it is going to be a beautiful day."

She left the room as soon as she had finished breakfast, and returned in about ten minutes.

"A gavotte in cream and gold," she said, making a low curtsey. "I hope it meets with your approval."

"My word!" said Rachel, "you do look the lady! and it's cheap stuff too. Why, I declare you would pass for a beauty if you took the trouble to dress well. It's wonderful how you become that hat!"

"Took a little trouble to dress well!" ejaculated Mona mentally. "A nice thing to say to a woman who makes dress her first aim in life!"

They walked in to Kirkstoun, and there took the coach. Mona would fain have gone outside, but Rachel wanted to point out the lions they passed on the way, and she considered that they got their "penny's worth" better inside. Fortunately there were not many passengers, and Mona succeeded in placing herself on the windward side of two fishwives.

About noon they reached St Rules, and wandered rather aimlessly through the streets, paying incidental visits to the various places of note. Rachel had about as much idea of acting the part of *cicerone* as she had of trimming hats, or making scones, or keeping shop, or indeed of doing anything useful; and she was in a constant state of nervous perturbation, lest some officious guide should force his services upon them, and then expect a gratuity.

The season was over and the visitors were few, so Mona's pretty gown attracted not a little attention. Simple as it was, she regretted fifty times that she had put it on; Rachel's dress would have escaped notice but for the contrast between them.

It was positively a welcome interlude when they arrived at the pastry-cook's; but at the door Rachel stood aside obsequiously, to give place to a lady who came up behind

them "in her carriage;" and then gave her own order in a shamefaced undertone, as if she had no right to make use of the shop at the same moment as so distinguished a personage. Poor Mona! She thought once more of Lady Munro, and she sighed.

"The only other thing that we really need to see," said Rachel, wiping her hands on a crumpled paper bag that happened to lie beside her, "is the Castle. I'll be glad to rest my legs a bit, while you run round and look about you."

She had at least shown her good sense in reserving the Castle as a *bonne bouche*. Mona's irritation vanished as she stood in the enclosure and saw the velvety green turf under foot, the broad blue sky overhead, the bold outline of ruined masonry round about, and the "white horses" riding in on the rugged coast below. She was wandering hither and thither, examining every nook and cranny, when suddenly, in an out-of-the-way corner she came upon a young man and a girl in earnest conversation. The girl started and turned her back, and Mona left them in peace.

"Surely I have seen that face before," she thought, "and not very long ago. I know! It is that silly little minx, Matilda Cookson. I hope the young man is up to no mischief."

In another moment the "silly little minx" was swept out of her mind; for, standing on a grassy knoll, laughing and talking with Rachel, she saw Dr Dudley.

An instinctive rush of surprise and pleasure, a feeling of uneasiness at the thought of what Rachel might be saying, a sense of satisfaction in her own fresh girlish gown,—all these passed through Mona's mind, as she crossed the open space in the sunshine.

"Well," said Dudley, as she joined them, "this can give a point or two even to Castle Maclean."

"Do you think so?" she responded gravely. "That is high praise"

He laughed. "Have you seen that gruesome dungeon?"

"Not properly. I am on my way to it now."

He turned to walk with her, and they leant over the railing looking down on the blackness below. A few feet from the top of the dungeon a magnificent hart's-tongue fern sprang from a crevice, and curled its delicate, pale-green fronds over the dank, dark stone.

"How lovely!" said Mona.

"Yes," he said. "And it is not only the force of contrast. Its gloomy surroundings really do make it more beautiful."

"Yes," said Mona relentlessly; "but it is not what Nature meant it to be."

"True," he replied. "Yet who would wish it transplanted!"

Presently he turned away, and looked over the rough blue sea.

"This place depresses me unspeakably," he said. "It reminds me of a book of 'martyr stories' I had when I was a child. I have a mental picture now of a family sitting round a blazing fire, and saying in awestruck whispers, 'It's no' sae cheery as this the nicht i' the sea tower by St Rules.' What appalling ideas of history they give us when we are children!" And he added half absently—

"'Sitzt das kleine Menschenkind
An dem Ocean der Zeit,
Schöpft mit seiner kleinen Hand
Tropfen aus der Ewigkeit.'"

Mona looked up with sparkling eyes and made answer—

"'Schöpfte nicht das kleine Menschenkind
Tropfen aus dem Ocean der Zeit,
Was geschieht verwehte wie der Wind
In den Abgrund öder Ewigkeit.'"

"Go on, go on," she said, regardless of his unconcealed surprise, "the best thought comes last." So he took up the strain again:—

"'Tropfen aus dem Ocean der Zeit
Schöpft das Menschenkind mit kleiner Hand.
Spiegelt doch, dem Lichte zugewandt,
Sich darin die ganze Ewigkeit.'"

"I don't know," he said moodily. "There was precious little of Eternity in the drops that were doled out to me."

"Not then," said Mona; "but when you were old enough to turn them to the light, you could see the eternal even there."

His face relaxed into a smile. This girl was like an outlying part of his own mind.

They strolled slowly back to Rachel.

"Do you enjoy sight-seeing?" he asked.

"The question is too big. Cut it down."

"Nay, I will judge for myself,—if you are not too tired to turn back to the town."

"Not a bit."

When Rachel heard of the proposal, she rose to her feet, with considerable help from Mona and from a stout umbrella. She would fain have "rested her legs" a little longer, and the necessity of acting the part of chaperon never so much as crossed her mind; but the honour of Dr Dudley's escort through the streets of St Rules was not to be lightly foregone.

The first half-hour brought considerably more pain than pleasure to Mona. She was straining every nerve to draw out the best side of Rachel; and this, under the circumstances, was no easy task.

Rachel's manner was often simple, natural, and even admirable, when she was speaking to her inferiors; but the society of any one whom she chose to consider her superior was sure to draw out her innate vulgarity. Mona understood Dr Dudley well enough to know that he had no regal disregard for what are known as "appearances," and she suffered more for him than for herself.

It did not occur to her that Rachel was acting very effectively the part of the damp, black wall, which was throwing the dainty fern into more brilliant relief.

"It is all his own doing," she thought indignantly. "Why has he brought this upon himself and me? And it will fall upon me to keep Rachel from talking about it for the next week."

Fortunately, though Rachel trudged about gallantly to the last, she soon became too tired to talk, and then Mona gave herself up to the enjoyment of the hour. Either Dr Dudley knew St Rules by heart, or he possessed a magnetic power of alighting on the things that were worth seeing. Curious manuscripts and half-effaced inscriptions; stained-glass windows and fine bits of carving; forgotten paintings, and quaint old vergers and janitors who had become a part of the buildings in which they had grown old;—all served in turn as the text for his brilliant talk. He might well say that talking was his *Verderben*.

Finally they wandered again through the ruins of the cathedral.

"'Pull down the nests and the rooks will fly away!'" quoted Dudley rather bitterly. "Here at least we have the other side of the 'martyr stories.'"

"I think sight-seeing is simply delightful," said Mona, as he stowed them into the coach; "but one wants special eyes to do it with."

"Everything becomes more interesting when seen 'through a temperament,'" he said. "I am glad if mine has served as a makeshift."

"She won't spot *that* reference," he thought to himself.

That evening all three made reflections about the day's outing.

"It came off wonderfully well, considering that I went in search of it," thought Dudley. "I fully expected it to be a dead failure. She *must* have met the draper accidentally."

"He is very gentlemanly and amazingly clever," thought Rachel; "and he seemed as pleased at the meeting as any of us. But how my legs *do* ache!"

"I'll no more of this masquerading!" thought Mona. "I will take the first opportunity of asking Rachel's per-

mission to tell him the whole truth. Perhaps he will take it all as a matter of course."

But when she went up to dinner the next day, Rachel calmly informed her that Dr Dudley had gone. "He has just walked up to the station with a bag in his hand," she said, "and Bill had a lot of luggage on a hurley. I think it's a queer sort of thing that he didn't look in and say good-bye, after we were all so friendly-like yesterday."

Mona smiled a little drearily.

"He might well say 'so long,'" she said to herself, an hour later, as she sat on the battlements of Castle Maclean. "Looked at in the abstract, as a period of time, three months is a pretty fair sample of the commodity!"

Thus does the feminine mind, while striving to grasp the abstract, fall back inevitably into the concrete!

"As a man," said Mona, "he is not a patch upon the Sahib; but I never had such a playfellow in my life!"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE FLYING SCOTCHMAN.

"What do you think, my dear?" said Rachel, a few days later, with beaming face. "I have just had a letter from my niece. Would you like to hear it?"

"Very much," said Mona. "'First Impressions of a New Continent.' Is it the first you have had?"

"No, it's the second. She's no great hand at the letter-writing. But there's more 'impressions' in this. She says the difficulty of getting servants is beyond everything."

Rachel proceeded to read the epistle; and for once Mona found herself in absolute accord with her cousin. Rachel's niece was certainly "no great hand at the letter-writing."

It was evening, and Mona had just come in from a stroll in the twilight. She did not often go out after tea, but there was no denying the fact that the last few days had not been very lively ones, and that physical exercise had become more desirable than ever. She had not realised, till he was gone, that Dr Dudley's occasional companionship made any appreciable difference in the world at Borrowness; but she did not now hesitate for a moment to acknowledge the truth to herself.

"It is almost as if I had lost Doris or Lucy," she said; "and of course, in a place like this, sympathetic companionship is at a premium. One might go into a melancholia here over the loss of an intelligent dog or a favourite canary. The fact that so many women have fallen in love throws a lurid light on the lives they must have led. Poor souls! I will write to Tilbury to-morrow to send me my little box of books. Two hours' hard reading a day is a panacea for most things."

With this wholesome resolution she returned from her walk, to find Rachel in a state of beatification over her niece's letter.

"I declare I quite forgot," she said; "there's a parcel and letter for you too. I think you'll find them on the chair by the door."

"Nothing of much interest," said Mona; "at least I don't know the handwriting on either. A begging-letter, I expect."

She proceeded to open the parcel first, untying the knot very deliberately, and speculating vaguely as to the cause of the curious damp smell about the wrappings. "Fancy Ruching" in gilt letters on one end of the box was apparently a misleading title; for, when the cover was removed, a mass of damp vegetation came to view.

Rachel lifted her hands in horror. The idea of bringing caterpillars and earwigs and the like of that into the house!

On the top of the box lay a sheet of moist writing-paper folded lengthwise. Mona took it up.

"Why," she said, "how very kind! It is from Mr Brown. He has been out botanising, and has sent me the fruits of an afternoon's ramble."

"The man must be daft!" thought Rachel, "to pay the postage on stuff that anybody else would put on the ash-heap. The very box isn't fit to use after having that rubbish inside it."

Fortunately, before she could give utterance to her thoughts, a brilliant idea flashed into her mind. Regarded absolutely, the box might be rubbish; but relatively, it might prove to be of enormous value.

Everybody knew that the draper was "daft"; but nobody considered him any the less eligible in consequence, either as a provost or as a husband. For the matter of that, Mona was "daft" too. She cared as much about these bits of weed and stick as the draper did. There would be a pair of them in that respect. And then—how wonderfully things do come about in life!—Mona would find a field for her undeniable gifts in the shopkeeping line. At Mr Brown's things were done on as large a scale as even she could desire; and if she were called upon some day to fill the proud position of "provost's lady," what other girl in the place would look the part so well?

Of course the house at Borrowness would be sadly dull without her. But she might want to go away some time in any case, and at Kilwinnie she would always be within reach. Rachel would not admit even to herself that it might almost be a relief in some ways to be delivered from the quiet thoughtful look of those bright young eyes.

She beamed, and glowed, and would have winked, if there had been any one but Mona to wink to. With her of course she must dissemble, till things had got on a little farther. In the meantime, Mr Brown, quiet as he looked, seemed quite capable of fighting his own battles; though if any one had sent *her* such a box in her young days, she would have regarded it in the light of a mock valentine.

She longed to know what Mr Brown had said; but, when

Mona handed her the letter, she found it sadly disappointing. In so far as it was not written in an unknown tongue, it seemed to be all about the plants; and who in the world had ever taken the trouble to give such grand names to things that grew in every potato-bed that was not properly looked after? But of course tastes did differ, and no doubt daft people understood each other.

Poor Rachel! This disappointment was nothing to the one in store for her. Mona had opened the "begging-letter," and had turned white to the lips.

"I must start by the early train to-morrow," she said, "and try to catch the Flying Scotchman. A little friend of mine in London is very ill."

It had proved to be a begging-letter indeed, but not of the kind she had supposed. It came from Lucy's father, Mr Reynolds.

"The doctor says that Lucy is in no actual danger," he wrote, "but she adds that her temperature *must not go* any higher. The child is fretting so for you that I am afraid this alone is enough to increase the fever. She was not very well when she left us to return to London a week ago; but our country doctor assured me there was no reason to keep her at home. Of course, Lucy had sent for a woman doctor before I arrived; and cordially as I approve her choice, a moment like this seems to call one's old prejudices, with other morbid growths, to life. Dr Alice Bateson seems very capable and is most attentive, but I need not deny that it would be a great relief to me to have you here. Lucy's mother is too much of an invalid to travel so far, and you have been like an elder sister to her for years.

"I know well that I need not apologise for the trouble to which I am putting you. I fully expect my little girl to improve from the moment she hears that I have written."

Mona read this aloud, adding, "I will go out and telegraph to him at once."

"Well, I'm sure," said Rachel, "it's a deal of trouble to take for a mere acquaintance—not even a blood relation."

"Lucy is more than a mere acquaintance," said Mona, with a quiver in her voice. "She has been, as he says, a little sister."

"What does he say is the matter?"

"Rheumatic fever."

"Then," said Rachel bitterly, "I suppose I may send your boxes after you?"

"No, no," said Mona, forcing herself to speak playfully; "a bargain is a bargain, and I mean to keep you to yours. Six months is in the bond. I will come back as soon as Lucy is well on the way to recovery—within a week, I hope. You know rheumatic fever is not the lengthy affair that it used to be. I assure you, dear, a visit to London is the very last thing I want at present. So far as I personally am concerned, I would infinitely rather stay with you. But I am not of so much use here that I should refuse to go to people who really need me."

If she wanted a crumb of encouragement, she was not disappointed, although Rachel was one of the people who do not find it easy to grant such crumbs.

"Well, I'm sure that's just what you are," she said. "I don't know what I am to do without you, and everybody says the shop has been a different place since you came." With a great effort she refrained from referring to stronger reasons still against Mona's departure.

Mona kissed her on the forehead.

"Then expect me back this day week or sooner," she said. "You don't want me more than I want to come."

This was the literal truth. When she had laid her plans, she was not grateful to the unfriendly Fates who interfered with their execution; she was honestly interested in her life at Borrowness; and it was a positive trial to return to London, a deserter at least for the time, just when all the scholastic world, with bustle and stir, was preparing for a new campaign.

She went to the post-office and sent off her telegram to Mr Reynolds, and another to Doris announcing the fact that

her old haunts and companions, just at present, never crossed the mind of large-souled Doris. "Mona capable of such pettiness!" she would have said in reply to the suggestion. "You little know her!"

"One has not much space for *minutiæ* in a telegram," said Mona, "or I would have explained that I am going to see a friend who is very ill. You have heard me speak of Lucy Reynolds?"

"Oh, I am sorry! But I shall not be in your way, you know. If you can spare a few hours some day, that is all I want."

"It is a matter of no moment of course, but do you happen to have any notion where you mean to put up?"

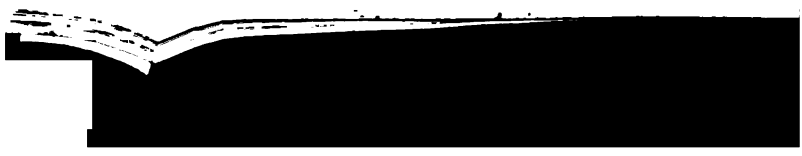
"I shall go to my aunt in Park Street of course, the one whose 'At Homes' you so loftily refused to attend. Father telegraphed to her last night, and I got a very cordial reply before I started. In point of fact, she is always glad to have me without notice. We don't stand on ceremony on either side."

"Well, you are a delightful person! I know no one who can do such sensible, satisfactory things without preliminary fuss. Shall we take our seats?"

"I took the seats long ago—two nice window seats in a third-class carriage. Your friend the 'pepper-pot' has duly deposited my wraps in one, and my dressing-bag in the other, and is now mounting guard in case of accident. You have plenty of time to have a cup of coffee at Spiers & Pond's."

In a few minutes they seated themselves in the carriage, dismissed the "pepper-pot," and launched into earnest conversation. Not till the train was starting did Mona raise her eyes, and then they alighted on a friendly, familiar figure. At the extreme end of the platform stood the Sahib. All unaware that she was in the train, he was waving his hat to some one else, his fine muscular figure reducing all the other men on the platform, by force of contrast, to mere pigmies.

When Mona saw him it was too late even to bow, and



The train had emerged on the open coast, and every line and curve on creek and cliff stood out sharp and clear in the crisp light of the October morning.

"Isn't it?" The line on Mona's brow vanished. "You know, Doris, I believe I am a bit of the east coast, I love it so. Heigh-ho! I do think Lucy must be better."

"Judging from what you have told me of her, I should think the chances were in favour of her meeting you at the station."

Mona laughed. "She *is* an india-rubber ball—up one moment, down the next; but it has been no laughing matter this time. I told you *she* got through her examination all right."

"Thanks to your coaching, no doubt."

"No, no, no! I begin to think Lucy has a better head all round than mine. The fact is, Doris, I have to readjust my views of life somehow, and the only satisfactory basis on which I can build is the conviction that we have all been under a complete misapprehension as to my powers. There is something gloriously restful in the belief that one is nothing great, and is not called upon to do anything particular."

Doris smiled with serene liberality. Mona had been in her mind constantly during the last month.

"Very well," she said. "As long as you feel like that, go your own way. I am not afraid that the mood will last. In a few months you will be neither to hold nor to bind."

"Prophet of evil!"

"Nay; prophet of good."

"It is all very well for you, in your lovely leisure, realising the ideal of perfect womanhood."

"Don't be sarcastic, please. You know how gladly I would exchange my 'lovely leisure' for your freedom to work. But we need not talk of it. My mind is perfectly at rest about you. This is only a reaction—a passing phase."

"A great improvement on the restless, hounding desire to inflict one's powers, talents, and virtues—save the mark!—

gravely. "I don't like moving in a circle. 'Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul!'"

Doris looked admiringly at her friend. She could very conscientiously have "made it a spiral," but she was not in the habit of talking in metaphors as Mona was.

The conversation dropped, and they sat for a long time listening to the rattle and roar of the train. Mona did not like it. Somehow it forced her to remember that there was no necessary connection between Lucy's condition and the bright October weather.

"A penny for your thoughts, Doris," she cried.

Doris's large grey eyes were sparkling.

"I was wondering," she said, "whether that delicious seal is still at the Zoo. Do you know?"

"I don't; you might as well ask me whether *Carolus Rex* is still brandishing his own death-warrant at Madame Tussaud's."

"Picture mentioning the two places on the same day!"

"I do it because they lie side by side in the fairy memory palace of childhood. Neither has any existence for me apart from that."

"And you a student of natural history! I should have thought that most of your spare time would have been spent at the Zoological Gardens."

"*Ars longa!*—but you are perfectly right. The Huxley of the next generation, instead of directing us to scalpel and dissecting-board, will tell us to forego the use of those, till we have studied the build and movements and habits of the animals in life. I quite agree with you that it is far better to know and love the creatures as you do, than to investigate personally the principal variations of the ground-plan of the vascular system, as I do."

"I don't see why we should not combine the two."

"Truly; but something else would have to go to the wall; Turner, perhaps, or Browning, or Wagner.

'We have not wings, we cannot soar;
But we have feet to scale and climb.'"

worse than ghastly, it is *awful*. That is why I say that outsiders should never see it. For the first few days, I used to clench my teeth, and repeat to myself over and over again, 'After life's fitful fever, he sleeps well.' It sounds ironical, does not it? But it comforted me. On any theory of life, *this* struggle was over for one poor soul; and, judging by the net result in this world, it must have been a sore and bitter struggle. But you know I could not have gone on like that; it would have killed me. I had to cease thinking about it at all in that way, and look upon it simply as my daily work—sometimes commonplace, sometimes enthralling. Sir Douglas would say I grew hardened, but I don't think I did."

"Hardened!" said Doris, her own eyes softening in sympathy as she watched Mona's lips quiver at the bare recollection of those days. "How like a man!"

"I never spoke of this before, except once when my uncle made me; but if you are determined to go in——"

"Oh yes, I mean to see all I can. You don't object very much, do you?"

"Object?" Mona's earnestness had all gone. "Did you ever know me object to anything? I did not even presume to advise; I only stated an opinion in the abstract. But here is York, and luncheon. We can continue the conversation afterwards."

But the conversation was over for that day. Just as the train was about to start, Doris leaned out of the window.

"Oh, Mona," she said, "here is a poor woman with four little children, looking for a carriage that will hold them all. Poor soul! She does look hot and tired. I do wish she would look in our direction. Here she comes!"

Doris threw open the door, and lifted the children and bundles in, one by one.

"You did not mind, did you?" she said suddenly to Mona, as the train moved on.

They got into a hansom, while the tall footman conducted Doris to a neat brougham, and a moment later they rattled away.

If Sir Douglas made Mona "a girl again," Mr Reynolds made her feel herself a child. With him her superficial crust of cynicism vanished like hoar-frost before the sun, and gave place to a gentle deference which had completely won the old man's heart. "The type of woman I admire," he had said with dignity to Lucy, "is the woman of clear intellect;" but it is probable that the woman of clear intellect would have appealed to him less, if she had not looked at him with pathetic revering eyes that seemed to say, "They call me clever and strong, but I am only a fatherless girl after all."

"Will Lucy be settled for the night when we get home?" Mona asked, when she had exhausted her other questions.

"No; she gets a hypodermic injection of morphia when the pain comes on, and that was to be postponed, if possible, till our arrival."

In a few minutes the cab drew up at a dimly lighted door in Bloomsbury. The house was old-fashioned and substantial; but a certain air of squalor is inseparably associated with most London lodgings, and it was not altogether absent here.

"Will you show this lady to her room?" said the clergyman courteously to the maid who opened the door.

"Not yet, thank you," said Mona. "Show me to Miss Reynolds's room, please. I will go there first."

The room was brightly lighted with a pretty lamp, for Lucy could not bear to have anything gloomy about her. She was lying in bed, propped up with pillows, her eyes curiously large and bright, her cheeks thin, her face worn with recent suffering.

Mona bit her lip hard. She had not realised that a few days of fever and pain could work such a change.

Lucy tried to stretch out her arms, and then let them fall with a pitiful little laugh. "I can't hug you yet, Mona,"

too many patients on her books to waste much time over them, unless there seemed to be a chance that she could be of definite use, physical or moral. She had spent hours with Lucy when things were at their worst, but minutes were ample now.

"Oh yes. Miss Reynolds will do famously," she said to Mona, who had left the room with her. "Fortunately I was close at hand, and she sent for me in time. With a temperament like hers, the temperature runs up and down very readily, and it went up so quickly that I was rather uneasy, but it never reached a really alarming height. Good night, Miss Maclean. I hope we shall see you at 'The New' before long."

"Thank you; there is nothing I should like better than to work under you at the Women's Hospital," and Mona ran back to Lucy's room.

"Now, my baby," she said caressingly, "I will arrange your pillows, and you shall go to sleep like a good child."

"Sleep," said Lucy dreamily. "I don't *sleep*. I go through the looking-glass into the queerest, most fantastic world you can imagine. *C'est magnifique—mais—ce n'est pas—le—sommeil.*" She roused herself with a slight effort. "About three I go to sleep, and don't wake till ten. How good it will be to see you beside me in the morning!"

Mr Reynolds came into the room, kissed the little white hand that lay on the counterpane, and then gave Mona his arm.

"You poor child," he said, as they left the room together, "you must be worn out and faint. That is your room, and the sitting-room is just at the foot of the stair. I will leave the door open. Supper is waiting."

A very pleasant hour the two spent together. Mona was at her best with Mr Reynolds,—simple, earnest, off her guard; and as for the clergyman, he was almost always at his best now.

"I felt quite sure you would come," he said, "but I am

ashamed to think of the trouble to which you have been put. I hope you have not had a very tiresome journey?"

"I have had a most pleasant journey from Edinburgh. My friend Doris Colquhoun came with me."

"Was that the fair young lady with the children? I was going to ask if you knew her. She had a very pleasing face."

"Yes; the children don't belong to her, but she has been mothering their weary mother. Doris is such a good woman. She does not care a straw for the petty personal things that most of us are occupied with. Even home comforts are a matter of indifference to her. But for animals, and poor women, and the cause of the oppressed generally, she has the enthusiasm of a martyr."

"She looks a mere girl."

"She is about my age; but she is so much less self-centred than I am, that she has always seemed to me a good deal older. She is my mother-confessor, and far too indulgent for the post."

"'A heart at leisure from itself'?"

"Yes, that is Doris all over. I don't believe she ever passed a sleepless night for sorrows of her own. By the way, Lucy says the morphia does not make her sleep."

"So she says, but it seems difficult to draw the line between sleeping and waking when one is under opium. I shall be thankful when Lucy can dispense with the drug, though I shall never forget my gratitude when I first saw the doctor administer it. It seemed to wipe out the pain as a wet sponge wipes out the marks on a slate."

"I know. There is nothing like it. We had a case in hospital of a man who was stabbed in the body. Modern surgery might have saved him, but he came into hospital too late, and they kept him more or less under morphia till the end. Whenever he began to come out of it, he wailed, 'Give me morphia, give me morphia!' and, oh, how unspeakably thankful one was that there was morphia to give him!"

The old man sighed. "It is a difficult subject, the 'mystery of pain.' We believe in its divine mission, and yet our theories vanish in the actual presence of it. When pain has been brought on by sin and folly, and seems morally to have a distinct remedial value, we should surely be very slow to relieve it; and yet how can we, seeing as we do only one little span of existence, judge of remedial value, except on a very small scale?"

"And therefore," said Mona deprecatingly, "we should surely err on the safe side, and be merciful, except in a case that is absolutely clear even to our finite eyes. At the best, the wear and tear of pain lowers our stamina—makes us less fit for the battle of life, more open to temptation."

He sighed again.

> "'So runs my dream, but what am I?
> An infant crying in the night!'

Ah, well! if we can say at the last day, 'I was not wise, but I tried to be merciful,' I think we shall find forgiveness; and, if we are to find peace and acceptance, so surely must all those whom we have wittingly or unwittingly wronged."

Pleasant as the evening was, Mr Reynolds insisted on making it a very short one.

"No, no. Indeed you shall not sit up with Lucy to-night. You want rest as much as she does. If she still needs any one to-morrow, we will talk about it, but she is progressing by strides." He kissed Mona on the forehead, and she went to her own room, to sleep a long dreamless sleep, broken only by the entrance of the hot water next morning.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A RENCONTRE.

True to her promise, Doris called before eleven.

"Well, this is a surprise," said Mona. "I did not in the least expect to see you."

"Why? I said I would come."

"Yes; but I thought you would go off to visit that woman, and forget all about me. What is old friendship when weighed against the misfortune of being 'hadden doon' of a husband and four children!"

"The man was a selfish brute," said Doris, ignoring an imputation she would have resented if her mind had been less full of other things. "Did you notice? He let his wife carry more than half the bundles. I sent John to take them from her, and fortunately that put him to shame."

"And how did John like it?"

Doris laughed. "Oh, I don't know; I never thought of him. I think John is rather attached to me."

"I have yet to meet the man in any rank of life who knows you and is not attached to you. I think that has taught me more of the nature of men than any other one thing. They little dream of the contempt and scorn that lie behind that daisy face, and yet they seem to know by a sort of instinct that their charms are thrown away on you,—that the fruit is out of reach; and instead of sensibly saying 'sour grapes,' they knock themselves to pieces against the wall."

"Mona, you do talk nonsense! I have scarcely had an offer of marriage in my life."

"I imagine that few women who really respect themselves have more than one, unless the men of their acquaintance —like the population of the British Isles — are 'mostly fools.'"

"Oh, they are all that. But I think what you say is very true. The first offer comes like a slap in the face, 'out of the everywhere.' Who could have foreseen it? But after that one gets to know when there is electricity in the air, don't you think so?"

"I suppose so. But the experience is not much in my line. Sensible men are rather apt to think me a *guter Kamerad*, and one weak-minded young curate asked me to share two hundred a year with him—his 'revenue' he called it, by the way. Behold the extent of my dominion over the other sex! I sometimes think," she added gloomily, "it is commensurate with the extent to which I have attained the ideal of womanhood!"

"Mona! If the sons of God were to take unto themselves wives of the daughters of men, we should hear a different tale. As things are, I am glad you are not a man's woman. You are a woman's woman, which is infinitely better. If you could be turned into a man to-morrow, half the girls of your acquaintance would marry you. I know I would, for one."

"You are my oldest friend, Doris," said Mona gratefully. "The others like me because I am moody and mysterious, and occasionally motherly. Women always fall in love with the Unknown."

"How could they marry men if it were otherwise?" said Doris, but she did not in the least mean it for wit.

"You miserable old cynic! I am going to introduce you to-day—I say advisedly introduce *you*—to a man who will convert even Doris Colquhoun to a love of his sex. He met me at the station last night, but I suppose you were too much taken up with your *protégées* to notice him."

"I caught a glimpse of white hair and an old-world bow. One can't judge of faces in the glaring light and black shadows of a railway station at night."

"That's true. Everybody looks like an amateur photograph taken indoors. But you shall see Mr Reynolds to-day. He promised to come in. Present company excepted, I don't

know that I love any one in the world as I do him—unless it be Sir Douglas Munro."

"Sir Douglas Munro! Oh Mona! I heard my father say once that Sir Douglas was a good fellow, but that no one could look at him and doubt that he had sown his wild oats very thoroughly."

"*Don't!*" said Mona, with a little stamp of her foot. "Why need we think of it? I cannot even tell you how kind he has been to me."

Doris was about to reply, but Mr Reynolds came in at the moment, and they chatted on general topics for a few minutes. "Dr Alice Bateson has just come in," he said, in answer to Doris's inquiry after Lucy.

Doris's face flushed. "Oh," she said eagerly, "I should so like to meet Dr Alice Bateson."

"Should you?" he said, with a fatherly smile. "That is easily managed. We will open the door and waylay her as she comes down. Ah, doctor! here is a young lady from Scotland who is all anxiety to make your acquaintance. May I introduce her?"

Miss Bateson came in. She did not at all like to be made a lion of, but Doris's fair, eager face was irresistible.

"I am very glad," Doris said shyly, "to express my personal thanks to any woman who is helping on what I consider one of the noblest causes in the world."

"It is a grand work," said Dr Bateson rather shortly. "Miss——" she looked at Mona.

"Maclean," said Mona, with a smile.

"Miss Maclean will be able to show you our School and Hospital. Perhaps we may meet some day at the Hospital. Good morning."

"Well?" said Mona, when she was gone.

"I think she is splendid—so energetic and sensible. But, you know, I do wish she wore gloves; and she would look so nice in a bonnet."

"Come, don't be narrow-minded."

"I am not narrow-minded. Personally I like her all the

thinking of."

"Oh, the Cause! It seems to me, dear, that the prophets of great causes always have a thorn in the flesh that they themselves are conscious of, and half-a-dozen other thorns that other people are conscious of; but the cause survives notwithstanding."

"I have no doubt that it will survive; but it seems to me that a little care on the part of the prophets would make it grow so much faster. Well, dear, I must go. I will come again on Friday. You will come to my aunt's 'At Home,' won't you?"

"If Lucy is better, and your aunt gives me another chance, I shall be only too glad. I shall have to unearth a gown from my boxes at Tilbury's. Heigh-ho, Doris! I might as well have gone all along, for all the good my abstinence did me. A deal of wasted pluck and moral courage goes to failing in one's Intermediate M.B.!"

"You have been gone a quarter of an hour," said Lucy fretfully, when Mona re-entered the sick-room, "and Miss Colquhoun had you all day yesterday."

"You are getting better, little woman," said Mona, kissing her.

"We have so much to talk about——"

"So we have, dear, but not to-day, nor yet to-morrow. I won't have my coming throw you back. You are to eat all the milk and eggs and nursery pudding that you possibly can, and I will read you the last new thing in three-volume novels."

Lucy resigned herself to this *régime* the more readily as she was too weak to talk; and she certainly did make remarkable progress in the next day or two. She was very soon able—rather to her own disappointment—to do without morphine at night; and when, a few days later, Mona read the last page of the novel, Lucy was lying in a healthy natural sleep.

Mona stole out of the room, listened outside the door for a minute or two, and then ran down-stairs.

somewhat fastidious taste; but she took as much pride in making the most of those pounds as if her own bread and cheese had depended on it. "We will do nothing hastily, my dear," she said to herself. "We will exhaust all the possibilities before we commit ourselves to the extent of one shilling. Oh dear, I am glad I have not to go to the School after all! I am in no mood for fencing."

Rash thought! It had scarcely passed through her mind before a voice behind her said—

"How do you do, Miss Maclean?" and looking round she saw two of her fellow-students, bag in hand.

As ill-luck would have it, one of them was the only student of her own year with whom Mona had always found herself absolutely out of sympathy. This one it was who spoke.

"It is a surprise to see you! Miss Reynolds said you were not coming back this winter."

"Nor am I. I am only in town for a day or two."

"Are you reading at home?"

"At present I am not reading at all."

"It seems a great pity."

"Do you think so? I think it does us no harm to climb up occasionally on the ridge that separates our little furrow from all the others, and see what is going on in the rest of the field."

"But you always did that, did you not? I thought you were a great authority on the uses of frivolling."

"And you thought it a pity that the results of my examinations did not do more to bear out my teaching? Never mind. It is only one of the many cases in which a worthy cause has suffered temporarily in the hands of an unworthy exponent."

The girl coloured. Mona's hypersensitive perception had read her thought very correctly.

"We miss you dreadfully," put in the other student hastily. "I do wish you would come back."

"I suppose," continued the first, glancing at the shop-

window before which they had met, "you are busy with your winter shopping. Regent Street has not lost its old attractions, though the Medical School has."

"What would they say," thought Mona, "if I calmly told them the whole truth?—that I am, with the utmost care and economy, buying goods for a very small shop in Borrowness, behind the counter of which I have the honour of standing, and serving a limited, and not very enlightened, public."

For a moment the temptation to "make their hair stand on end" was almost irresistible; but fortunately old habits of reserve are not broken through in a moment, and she merely said, "Oh no. It will be a serious symptom when Regent Street loses its attractions. That would indeed be a strong indication for quinine and cod-liver oil, or any other treatment you can suggest for melancholia. Good-bye, and success to you both!"

She shook hands—rather cavalierly with the first, cordially with the second. "*You* all right?" she asked quietly, as they parted.

"Yes, thank you."

"She *is* queer," said the student who had spoken first, when Mona was out of hearing. "My private opinion is that she is going to be married. My brother saw her on board one of the Fjord steamers in Norway a month or two ago, with a very correct party; and he said a tall fellow 'with tremendous calves' was paying her a lot of attention."

"Did your brother speak to her?"

"No. He was much smitten with her at the last prize-giving, and wanted me to introduce him, but I did not get a chance. She knows a lot of people. I think she gives herself too many airs, don't you?"

"I used to, but I began to think last term that that was a mistake. You know, Miss Burnet, I like her."

"I don't."

"The fact is,"—the girl coloured and drew a long breath,—"I know you won't repeat it, but I have much need to

like her. I was in frightful straits for money last term. I actually had a summons served upon me. I could not tell my people at home, and one night, when I was simply in despair, I went to Miss Maclean. I did not like her, but borrowers can afford even less than beggars to be choosers, and she always seemed to have plenty of money. She was by no means the first person I had applied to, and I had ceased to expect anything but refusals. Well, I shall never forget how her face lighted up as she said, 'How good of you to come to me! I know what it is to be short of money myself.' I did not think she gave herself airs then; I would have worked my fingers to the bone, if it had been necessary, to pay her back before the end of term."

"I don't see anything so wonderful in that. She had the money, and you had not."

"That's all very well. Wait till you have been refused by half-a-dozen people who could quite afford to help you. Wait till you have been treated to delightful theories on the evils of borrowing, when you are half frantic for the want of a few pounds."

"I am sure Miss Maclean wastes money enough. I was in the pit at the Lyceum one night, and I saw her and Miss Reynolds in the stalls. I am quite sure none of the money came out of Miss Reynolds' pocket."

"Miss Reynolds is a highly favoured person. I quite admit that there is nothing wonderful about *her*. But I like Miss Maclean, and if she gives up medicine she will be a terrible loss."

"She has been twice ploughed."

"The more shame to the examiners!"

"Doris," said Mona a few minutes later, as she entered the æsthetic drawing-room where her friend was sitting alone at tea, "stay me with Mazawattee and comfort me with crumpets, for I have just met my *bête noire*."

Doris looked up with a bright smile of welcome. "Come," she said, "'don't be narrow-minded'!"

Mona took up a down cushion and threw it at her friend.

"Pick that up, please," said Doris quietly. "If my aunt comes in and sees her new Liberty cushion on the floor, it will be the end of you, so far as her good graces are concerned."

Mona picked it up, half absently, and replaced it on the sofa.

"Well, go on. Tell me all about your *bête noire*. Who is he?"

"*He*, of course! How is one to break it to you, dear Doris, that every member of our charming sex is not at once a Hebe and a Minerva?"

"I will try to bear up—remembering that 'God Almighty made them to match the men.' Proceed."

But Mona did not proceed at once. She drank her tea and looked fierce.

"I *am* narrow-minded," she said at last. "I wish that any power, human or divine, would prevent all women from studying medicine till they are twenty-three, and any woman from studying it at all, unless she has some one qualification, physical, mental, moral, or social, for the work. These remarks do not come very aptly from one who has been twice ploughed, but we are among friends."

"Well, dear," said Doris thoughtfully, "there were a few students at the School to-day whom one could have wished to see—elsewhere; but on the whole, they struck me as a party of happy, healthy, sensible, hard-working girls."

"Did they?" said Mona eagerly; "I am very glad."

"Yes, assuredly they did, and a few of them seemed to be really remarkable women."

"Oh yes! the exceptions are all right; but tell me about your visit. I wish you could have gone in summer, when they are sitting about in the garden with books and bones, and materia medica specimens."

"Two of them were playing tennis when I went in—playing uncommonly well too. We watched them for a while, and then we went to the dissecting-room."

"Well?"

"I am very glad you told me what you did about it—*very*. I think if I had gone quite unprepared I might have found it very ghastly and very awful. It is painful, of course, but it is intensely interesting. The demonstrator is such a nice girl. She took me round and showed me the best dissections; I had no idea the things looked like that. Do you know"—Doris waxed triumphant—"I know what fascia is, and I know a tendon from a nerve, and both from a vein."

"You have done well. Some of us who have worked for years cannot say as much—in a difficult case."

"Don't mock me; you know what I mean. Oh, Mona, how you can be in London and not go back to your work is more than I can imagine."

"Yes? That is interesting, but not strictly to the point. What did you do when you left the dissecting-room?"

"Attended a physiology lecture, delivered by a young man who kept his eyes on the ceiling, and never moved a muscle of his face, unless it was absolutely necessary."

"I know," said Mona, laughing; "but he knew exactly what was going on in the room all the time, and was doubtless wondering who the new and intelligent student was. He is delightful."

"He seemed nice," said Doris judicially, "and he certainly was very clever; but it would be much better to have women lecturers."

"That's true. But not unless they did the work every whit as well as men. You must not forget, dear, that a good laundress helps on the 'cause' of women better than a bad doctor or lecturer."

"Oh, I know that. But there must be plenty of women capable of lecturing on physiology."

Mona shrugged her shoulders.

"More things go to making a good physiology lecturer than you imagine,—a great many more," she added impressively.

Doris's face flushed.

"Not vivisection!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, vivisection. It may be that our modern science has gone off on an entirely wrong tack; it may be, as a young doctor said to me at Borrowness the other day, that we cannot logically stop short now of vivisecting human beings; but, as things are at present, I do not see how any man can conscientiously take an important lectureship on physiology, unless he does original work. I don't mean to say that he must be at that part of it all the time. Far from it. He may make chemical physiology or histology his specialty. But you see physiology is such a floating, growing, mobile science. It exists in no text-book. Photograph it one day, and the picture is unrecognisable the next. What the physiologist has to do is to plunge his mind like a thermometer into the world of physiological investigation, and register one thing one moment, and another thing the next. He need never carry on experiments on living animals before his students, but he must live in the midst of the growing science—or be a humbug. I thought once that I should like nothing better than to be a lecturer on physiology, but I see now that it is impossible," she shivered,—"although, you know, dear, vivisection, as it exists in the popular mind, is a figment of the imaginations of the anti-vivisectionists."

Doris did not reply. She could not bear to think that Mona did not judge wisely and truly; she tried to agree with her in most things; but this was a hard saying.

"What does the young doctor at Borrowness say to a woman doctor?" she asked suddenly.

Mona winced. "He does not know that I am a medical student. Why should he?"

"Oh, Mona, you don't mean to say you have not told him! What an opportunity lost!"

"It is not my custom to go about ticketed, dear; but, if you wish, you shall tie a label round my neck."

"However, you will see him again. There is no hurry."

"It is to be hoped not," said Mona a little bitterly; "and now, dear, I must go."

CHAPTER XXIV.

A CLINICAL REPORT.

Lucy was up—actually standing by the fire in her own room—and Lucy was as saucy as ever.

"I believe you have grown," said Mona, regarding her critically.

"I should think I had! I must be two inches taller at least. What do you think, Mona? I have had two offers of marriage this summer."

"That is not surprising. I never had much opinion of the intelligence of the other sex. I hope you refused them."

"I did; but I will accept the next man who asks me, even if he is a chimney-sweep, just to spite you."

"Poor chimney-sweep! But look here, Pussy, you should not stand so long. Sit down in the arm-chair, and let me wrap you up in the eider-down. And put your feet on the stool—so! Comfy?"

"Very comfy, thanks."

"When you are strong enough, I want you to give me a full, particular, and scientific account of your illness. How came *you* by acute rheumatism? You are not a beef and beer man."

"Well, when I went home I was in the most tearing spirits for the first week, and then I gradually began to feel fit for nothing. No appetite, short breath, and all the rest of it. I knew all I wanted was a tonic, and I determined to prescribe one for myself, on the strength of an intimate acquaintance with Mitchell Bruce. As a preparatory step, in the watches of the night, I tried to run over the ingredients and doses of the preparations of iron; but for the life of me I could not remember them. Think of it! A month after the examination! I could not even remember that

pièce de résistance—you know!—the 'cinchona bark, calumba root, cloves' thing."

"Compound tincture of cardamoms and tincture of orange-peel," completed Mona mechanically.

"Of course. That's it. 'Macerated in peppermint-water,' wasn't it? or something of that sort. However, it does not matter now that I have passed."

"Not in the least!"

"Well, while I meditated, mother sent for the doctor, a mere boy—ugh! If I had been seriously ill, I should have said, 'Welcome death!' and declined to see him; but it was only a question of a tonic, so I resigned myself. He prescribed hypophosphites, and said I was to have a slice off the roast, or a chop or something, and a glass of porter twice a day."

"*Ah!*" said Mona.

"It was no use telling mother that the infant knew less than I did. He was 'the doctor,' and that was enough. His word was law. I will say this for him, that I did get stronger; but just before I came back to town, I began to feel ill in quite a different way; indescribably queer, and fidgety and wretched. Mother made me stick to the beef and porter, as if my soul's weal had depended on it, and we all hoped the change to London might do me good. Just at first, I did feel a little better, and one afternoon Marion Proctor asked me to go down the river with her, and I went. My white dress was newly washed, and I had just done up my hat for the sixth time this summer. You may say what you like, Mona, but I did look awfully nice."

"I don't doubt it."

"I did not take my waterproof, because it completely spoilt the general effect, and I was sure it would not rain; but, as I told you, a tremendous thunderstorm came on, and we were drenched."

"Oh, Lucy!"

"When we got back here, there was not a fire in the house, and, do what I would, I got thoroughly chilled. I

was shivering so, and I felt so feverish, that Marion insisted on spending the night with me. She slept in the room you have, and I was to knock on the wall if I wanted her."

Lucy stopped and shivered.

"There, dear," said Mona, "you will tell me the rest another time. You are tiring yourself."

"No, I am not; I like to tell you. Mona, I woke at two in the morning with these words in my mind, 'The sufferings of the damned.' Don't call me irreverent. You don't know what it is. It took me *three-quarters of an hour* to get out of bed to knock for Marion, and the tears were running down my face like rain."

"My poor baby!" Mona got up and knelt down beside her; but Lucy was already laughing at the next recollection.

"Oh, Mona, I did not see the comedy of it then, but I shall never forget that sight. The glimmering candle—Marion shivering in her night-dress, her sleepy eyes blinking as she read from a medical book, 'Rheumatism is probably due to excess of sarcolactic acid in the blood'! as if I was not far past caring what it was due to! Good old Marion! she dressed herself at once, and at six she went for Dr Bateson. Of course with the dawn the pain just came within the limits of endurance; but when the doctor gave me morphia, I could have fallen down and worshipped her."

"You poor little girl! How I wish I had been here! Let me go, dear, a minute. It is time for your medicine.'

"Nasty bitter-sweet stuff—I wish I could stop *that!*"

"Why? I am sure it has worked wonders. How I wish we knew exactly how it acts!"

Lucy laughed. "You are as bad as Marion," she said. "If you were on the rack, you would not trouble yourself to understand the mechanism that stopped the wheels, so long as they were stopped. I leave it to you, dear, to cultivate the infant bacillus on a nice little nutrient jelly, and then polish him off with a dilute solution of salicin."

"What we want now," said Mona meditatively, stroking

the curly red hair, "is to get back our baby face. How do we mean to set about it?"

Lucy made a little *moue*. "Dr Bateson said something about the south of France—such a waste of time! And Father says when I come back to London I am to live at the College Hall again."

"I am very glad to hear it. I always thought your leaving was a great mistake."

"Why, you lived in rooms yourself!"

"Oh, *I!* I am an old granny full of fads, and quite able to take care of myself."

"Your best friend could not deny that you are full of fads; and that reminds me, Mona, it is your innings now. I am 'dagging' to hear all about Borrowness, and the shop and your cousin. Your last letter fell very flat on expectant spirits."

Mona went leisurely back to her chair. "You see, dear," she said, "I am in rather a difficult position. It would be very amusing to give you a piquant account of my doings; but I went to Borrowness of my own free will, and even an unvarnished story of my life there would be disloyal to my cousin. Borrowness is not a pretty place. The country is flat, but the coast is simply glorious. The rocks——"

"Thanks—I don't mind taking the rocks for granted. I want to hear about your cousin and the shop."

"I will give you a rough outline of my cousin, and leave the details to your vivid imagination. She is very kind, very pious, very narrow, and very dull."

"*Good Lord deliver us!*" murmured Lucy gravely. "And the shop?"

"The shop is awful. You can imagine nothing worse than the truth."

"A nice sphere for Mona Maclean!"

"Oh, my dear, there is sphere enough in all conscience—only too much sphere! I never saw so clearly in my life before that nothing depends on what a man does, but that everything depends on how he does it. Even that twopenny-

halfpenny shop might be made a centre of culture and taste and refinement for the whole neighbourhood."

"You would have to get rid of your cousin first."

"I don't know. One would rather have quite a free hand. But she is wonderfully liberal about things that must seem sheer nonsense to her."

"She well may be!"

"That is absurd. Why should she pay in appreciation for qualities that she does not in the least want, and would rather be without? You must not judge of my suitability to her by my suitability to—you, for instance."

"Then she does not even appreciate you?"

Mona meditated before replying. "She likes me," she said, "but she thinks me absurdly 'superior' one minute, and gratuitously frivolous the next. She has not got hold of the main thread of my character, so of course she thinks me a bundle of inconsistencies."

"Why do you stay?"

Mona sighed. "We won't go into that, dear. I have committed myself. Besides, my cousin likes me; she was very unwilling to part with me, even for a week."

"Selfish brute!" said Lucy inconsistently. "Is there any society?"

"No; but if there were, it would consider itself a cut above me."

"Any men?"

There was a momentary pause. "My dear, do I ever know anything about the men in a place?"

"I was hoping you had started a few of your Platonic friendships. They would at least save you from moping to death."

"Moping to death!" said Mona, springing to her feet. "My dear child, I never was farther from that in my life. I botanise, and once in a way I meet some of the greatest living scientists. I do the best sketches I ever did in my life, and I have developed a greater talent for millinery than you can even conceive!"

CHAPTER XXV.

A VOICE IN THE FOG.

A dense fog hung over the city.

Doris and Mona had spent half the day among the shops and stores, and Mona was in a glow of satisfaction. She was convinced that no human being had ever made a ten-pound note go so far before, and it was with difficulty that she could be induced to talk of anything else.

Doris was much amused. She believed in letting people "gang their ain gait," and a day with Mona was worth having under most conditions; but how any intelligent human being could elect to spend it so, was more than she could divine.

"It would have come to all the same in the end," she said, laughing, "if you had sent a general order to the Stores, and left the details to them; and it would have saved a vast amount of energy."

"Ah!" said Mona. When the two girls were together, Mona felt about petty things what Doris felt about great ones, that one must not expect absolute sympathy even from one's dearest friends.

By common consent, however, they dropped into St James's Hall for an hour, when their work was over, to refresh themselves with a little music. The overture to Tannhäuser was the last item on the programme, and Mona would have walked twenty miles any day to hear that. It was dark when they left the building, and the fog had reduced the sphere of each street lamp to a radius of two or three yards; but Mona could easily have found her way home to "blessed Bloomsbury" with her eyes shut. Doris was going to the Reynolds' to supper, to meet Lucy for the first time, and her aunt's brougham was to fetch her at night.

"Listen, Mona," she said suddenly, as they made their way along Piccadilly, "there are two men behind us discussing your beloved Tannhäuser."

This was interesting. Mona mentally relinquished her knick-knacks, and pricked up her ears.

At first she could only hear something about "sheer noise," "hideous crash of chords," "gospel of din"; but a moment later the hand that rested on Doris's arm twitched involuntarily, for the mellow, cultured voice that took up the discussion was strangely familiar.

"My dear fellow, to my mind that is precisely the point of the whole thing. The Pilgrims' Chorus is beautiful and suggestive when one hears it simply and alone, in its own special sphere, so to speak; but when it rises clear, steady, and unvarying, without apparent exertion, above all the reiterated noise and crash and distraction of the world, the flesh, and the devil,—why, then, it is an inspiration. It becomes triumphant by sheer force of continuing to be itself."

The first voice said something about "want of melody," and then the deep bass went on,—

"I am not at all learned in the discussion from a technical point of view. To my mind it is simply a question of making the opera an organic whole,—not a collection of works of art, but one work of art. Take *Don Juan* for instance——"

The men turned down a side street, and the voices died away in the distance.

"What a beautiful voice!" said Doris.

"Yes."

"Do you know, Mona, I think that must have been a nice man."

"Because of the voice?"

"Because of the voice, and because of what the voice said. Young men don't talk like that as a rule."

"How do you know he was young?"

"I am sure that 'my dear fellow' was not more than twenty-five."

"Twenty-seven, I should think," said Mona reflectively.

Doris laughed. "You are very exact. Or is it that you have gone back to the inkstands?"

Mona sighed. "Yes," she said gravely, "I have gone back to the inkstands."

There was silence for a few minutes.

"I should like to know who that young man was," said Doris presently.

"Why, Doris, you are coming out in a new *rôle*. It is not like you to be interested in a young man."

"The more reason why I should be interested in an exceptional one."

"You dear old Doris!" said Mona affectionately. "He talks well, certainly; but what if talking be, like Gretchen's beauty, his *Verderben*?"

"I don't think it likely—not that kind of talking."

"Assuredly that kind—if any."

But she thought, "Not any. He has chosen the right corrective. If he possesses the gift of utterance, he will at least have something to utter."

"It has been such a delightful week," said Doris, "and now another nice long railway journey with you to-morrow will bring it all to an end. You are a highly privileged mortal, Mona, to be able to order your life as you choose."

Mona smiled without replying. This was a well-worn subject of debate.

"I know what you are going to say," continued Doris. "But it is no use asking me. I don't know *which* of those little inkstands was the best, and I think you did very wisely in ordering an equal number of both."

"Yes," said Mona; "and the hinges were so strong, weren't they? That is the point to look to in a cheap inkstand."

"What an age you have been!" said Lucy, as they entered the dining-room, where she was seated by the fire, arrayed in her comfortable dressing-gown. "I was just going to send

the bellman after you. So glad to meet you, Miss Colquhoun."

"She is not so pretty as I am," Lucy thought, "but Mona will never see that."

Certainly Lucy's interest in the afternoon's shopping abundantly atoned for Doris's lofty indifference. "Of course, you had to have the things sent straight to the station," she said, "but I do wish I could have gone with you. Tell me all about it. Where did you go first?"

Fortunately Mr Reynolds came in at this moment, so Doris was not forced to go over all the ribbons and flowers and note-paper and what-nots again.

"Keep a thing seven years, and its use will come," said Mona. "My childish passion for shop-windows and pretty things has stood me in good stead, you see. You have no idea how crisp and fresh all the things looked. The shop will simply be another place. I need not blush now whenever a new customer comes in."

"How I wish I could come and see it!" said Lucy. "I am sure I could 'dress a window' beautifully. Do you think Borrowness would do me as much good as the Riviera? It would come a great deal cheaper, would not it?"

"Much," said Mona, smiling; "but the cutting east wind has a knack of finding out one's weak places, and you must not forget that you have a traitor in the garrison now."

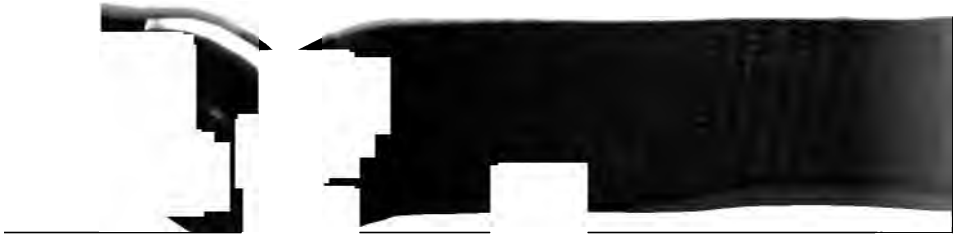
"It is so awfully unfortunate! My fees are paid, and of course there have been a lot of new books this term. Father simply cannot afford to send me away."

"Don't fret. I think you will find that it can be done very cheaply."

"Cheapness is a relative thing. You must remember that our whole income does not come to much more than yours."

"Well, at least your board here would be saved."

In point of fact, Mona had already written to Lady Munro about her friend's illness, and she hoped the answer would be an invitation to Lucy to spend a month or two at Cannes. Mona knew that the Munros were not at all the kind of



people who are on the outlook for opportunities to benefit their fellow-men, but for that very reason they might be the more likely to do a graceful action that actually came in their way. The arrangement was extremely awkward, so far as she herself was concerned, for she did not mean the Munros to know that she was spending the winter at Borrowness. However, that was a minor and selfish consideration, and no doubt it could be arranged somehow.

In the midst of the conversation supper was announced. It was a homely meal, but the simplest proceedings always acquired a charm and dignity when Mr Reynolds took part in them. As soon as it was over he took Mona aside.

"Dr Bateson tells me it is very desirable that Lucy should get into a warmer climate for a month or two," he said, "before a rheumatic habit has any chance to assert itself. I am anxious to send her to the south of France, and I want you to tell me how it can be cheaply and satisfactorily done. I need not tell you, after what you saw of our life when you were with us, that Lucy's education is a heavy strain upon my purse. In fact, I give it to her because a profession is almost the only provision I can make for her future. I never allow myself to be absolutely unprepared for an unexpected drain; but Lucy's hospital fees have just been paid, and altogether this has come at a most unfortunate time."

"I know very little about the matter at present," said Mona, "but I can easily make enquiries, as I have friends in the Riviera now. My impression is, that you can do it satisfactorily, and at the same time cheaply; but I will let you know before the end of the week."

"If my aunt declines to rise to the occasion," she thought, "I will manage by hook or by crook to make them take the money from me."

Meanwhile Doris and Lucy were getting on together pretty well. Doris was shy, but she was prejudiced in Lucy's favour by the fact that she was a woman and a medical student. Lucy was not at all shy, but she was somewhat prejudiced against Doris by the fact that she was Mona's oldest friend.

"Did not Mona look lovely at Mrs Percival's 'At Home'?" asked Lucy. "She always looks nice; but in that blue velvet, with her old lace and pearls, I think she is like an empress."

"She has a very noble face, and a very lovable face. I suppose she is not beautiful, though it is not always easy to believe it."

"Was she a great success?"

"I don't think I quite know what you mean by a success. Mona never commands a room. Perhaps she might if she laid herself out to do it. Every one who spoke to her seemed much interested in her conversation."

This was scarcely to the point. What Lucy wanted to know was whether Mona had proved "fetching"; but Doris's serene face was not encouraging, and she dared not ask.

"Mona is a fortunate being," she said.

"Oh, very!"

"It must be delightful to have plenty of new gowns and all sorts of pretty things."

Doris looked aghast. Mona sometimes talked in this way, but then Mona was—Mona. No one could look at her face and suspect her of real frivolity; but this child ought to be careful.

"It must be a great deal more delightful to be able to study medicine," she said, with a little more warmth than she intended.

Lucy shrugged her shoulders. "Oh yes," she said, uncertain whether she was speaking in jest or in earnest. Then she laughed,—

> "So ist es in der Welt;
> Der Eine hat den Beutel,
> Der Andere das Geld."

"The fact is, our circles did not overlap much," she confided to Mona afterwards. "Our circumferences just touched somewhere about the middle of your circle."

"You see, Doris is a great soul."

"Ample reason, truly, why her circle should not coincide with mine. But you know, Mona, she would be a deal more satisfactory if she were a little less great, or a little small as well."

"She told me you were a dear little thing, and so pretty."

"*She's* not pretty!"

"Perhaps not, but she is fascinating, just because she never tries to fascinate. A man of the world said to me at that 'At Home,' that Miss Colquhoun was just the woman to drive a man over head and ears in love."

"Did he really? Miss Colquhoun? How queer! What did you say?"

"I cordially agreed with him."

"But has she had many offers?"

"She would not talk of them if she had; but you may take it as broadly true, that every man of her acquaintance is either living in hope, or has practically—I say *practically*—been rejected."

"Oh, Mona, that is a large order! You see, the fact is, I am jealous of Miss Colquhoun."

"My dear Pussy! Doris and I were chums before you were born."

"*Raison de plus!* Look here, dear! you say things to me that you would not say to her?"

"Oh yes!"

"And you don't say things to her that you would not say to me?"

"Oh yes!"

Lucy laughed, discomfited. "I choose not to believe it," she said.

Mona kissed her affectionately. "Come, that is right! With that comfortable creed for a pillow, you ought to have an excellent night."

CHAPTER XXVI.

A CHAT BY THE FIRE.

Mona hesitated at the door of her own room, and then decided to run down for ten minutes to the sitting-room fire. She was too depressed to go to bed, and she wanted something to change the current of her thoughts. To her surprise, she found Mr Reynolds still in his large arm-chair, apparently lost in thought.

Prompted by a sudden impulse, she seated herself on a stool close to him, and laid her hand on his knee.

"Mr Reynolds," she said, "life looks very grey sometimes."

He smiled. "We all have to make up our minds to that, dear;" and after a pause he added, "This is a strange duty that you have imposed upon yourself."

"Yes."

"For six months, is it not?"

"Yes."

"How much of the time is over?"

"Little more than one month."

"And the life is very uncongenial?"

"At the present moment—desperately. Not always," she added, laughing bravely. "Sometimes I feel as if the sphere were only too great a responsibility; but now—I don't know how to face it to-morrow."

"Poor child! I can only guess at all your motives for choosing it; but you know that

> 'Tasks in hours of insight willed,
> Can be through hours of gloom fulfilled.'"

"Mr Reynolds, it was not insight, it was impulse. You see, I really had worked intelligently and conscientiously for years; I had never indulged in amusement purely for

amusement's sake; and when I failed a second time in my examination, I felt as if the stars in their courses were fighting against me. It seemed no use to try again. Things had come to a deadlock. From the time when I was little more than a child, I had had the ordering of my own life, and perhaps you will understand how I longed for some one to take the reins for a bit. On every side I saw girls making light of, and ignoring, home duties; and, just I suppose because I had never had any, such duties had always seemed to me the most sacred and precious bit of moral training possible. I considered at that time that my cousin was practically my only living relative, and she was very anxious that I should go to her. I had promised to spend a fortnight with her in the autumn; but the day after I knew that I had failed, I wrote offering to stay six months.

"Of course I ought to have waited till I saw her and the place; but her niece had just been married, and she really wanted a companion. If I did not go, she must look out for some one else. I don't mean to pretend that that was my only reason for acting impulsively. The real reason was, that I wanted to commit myself to something definite, to burn my boats on some coast or other. I seemed to have muddled my own life, and here was a human being who really wanted me, a human being who had some sort of natural right to me."

"Dear child, why did you not come and be my elder daughter for a time? It would have been a grand thing for me."

Mona laughed through her tears, and, taking his delicate white hand in both her own, she raised it to her lips. "Sir Douglas said nearly the same thing, though he does not know what I am doing; but either of you would have spoilt me a great deal more than I had ever spoilt myself. You were kind enough to ask me to come to you at the time; but I thought then that I had passed my examination, and I did not know you as I do now. I was restless, and wanted

to shake off the cobwebs on a walking tour; but when I heard that I had failed all the energy seemed to go out of me."

It was some minutes before he spoke.

"Tell me about your life at Borrowness There is a shop, is there not?"

"I don't quarrel with the shop," said Mona warmly; "the shop is the redeeming feature. You don't know how it brings me in contact with all sorts of little joys and sorrows. I sometimes think I see the very selves of the women and girls, as neither priest nor Sunday-school teacher does. I have countless opportunities of sympathising, and helping, and planning, and economising — even of educating the tastes of the people the least little bit—and of suggesting other ways of looking at things. And there is another side to the question too. Some of those women teach me a great deal more than I could ever teach them."

"And what about your cousin?"

Mona hesitated. "I told Lucy that to give even a plain, unvarnished account of my life at Borrowness would be a disloyalty to my cousin, but one can say anything to you. Mr Reynolds, I knew before I went that my cousin was not a gentlewoman, that ours had for two generations been the successful, hers the unsuccessful, branch of my father's family. I knew she lived a simple and narrow life; but how could I tell that my cousin would be vulgar?—that if under any circumstances it was possible to take a mean and sordid view of a person, or an action, or a thing, she would be sure to take that mean and sordid view? I have almost made a vow never to lose my temper, but it is hard—it is all the harder because she is so good!

"Now you know the whole story. Pitch into me well. You are the only person who is in a position to do it, so your responsibility is great."

He had never taken his eyes from her mobile face while she was speaking. "I have no wish to pitch into you well," he said; "you disarm one at every turn. I need

not tell you that your action in the first instance was hasty and childish—perhaps redeemed by just a dash of heroism."

Mona lifted her face with quivering lips.

"Never mind the heroism," she said, with a rather pathetic smile. "It *was* hasty and childish."

"But I do mind the heroism very much," he said, passing his hand over her wavy brown hair. "I believe that some of the deeds which we all look upon as instances of sublime renunciation have been done in just such a spirit. It is one of the cases in which it is very difficult to tell where the noble stops and the ignoble begins. But of one thing I am quite sure—the hasty and childish spirit speedily died a natural death, and the spirit of heroism has survived to bear the burden imposed by the two."

"Don't talk of heroism in connection with me." Mona bit her lip. "I see there is one thing more that I ought to tell you, since I have told you so much. When I went to Borrowness there was some one there a great deal more cultured than myself, whose occasional society just made all the difference in my life, though I did not recognise it at the time. It is partly because I have not that to look forward to when I go back that life seems so unbearable."

"Man or woman?"

"Man, but he was nice enough to be a woman."

The words were spoken with absolute simplicity. Clearly, the idea of love and marriage had not crossed her mind.

"Did he know your circumstances?"

"No; he took for granted that Borrowness was my home. I might have told him; but my cousin had made me promise not to mention the fact that I was a medical student."

"And he has gone?"

"Yes; he may be back for a week or so at Christmas, but I don't know even that." Mona looked up into the old man's face. "Now," she said, "you know the whole truth as thoroughly as I know it myself."

He repaid her look with interest.

"Honest is not the word for her," he thought. "She is simply crystalline."

"If I had the right," he said, "I should ask you to promise me one thing."

"Don't say '*If* I had the right,'" said Mona. "Claim it."

"Promise that you will not again give away your life, or any appreciable part of it, on mere impulse, without abundant consideration."

"I will promise more than that if you like. I will promise not to commit myself to anything new without first consulting you."

He could scarcely repress a smile. Evidently she did not foresee the contingency that had prompted his words. What a simple-hearted child she was, after all!

"I decline to accept that promise," he said; "I have abundant faith in your own judgment, if you only give it a hearing. But when your mind is made up, you know where to find a sympathetic ear; or if you should be in doubt or difficulty, and care to have an old man's advice, you know where to come for it. Make me the promise I asked for at first; that is all I want."

Mona looked up again with a smile, and clasped her hands on his knee. "I promise," she said slowly, "never again to give away my life, or any appreciable part of it, on mere impulse, without abundant consideration."

He smiled down at the bright face, and then stooped to kiss her forehead. "And now," he said, "let us take the present as we find it. I suppose no one but yourself can decide whether this duty is the more or the less binding because it is self-imposed."

Mona's face expressed much surprise. "Oh," she said, "I have not the smallest doubt on that score. I must go through with it now that I have put my hand to the plough."

"I am glad you think so, though there is something to be said on the other side as well. Your mind is made up, and that being so, you don't need me to tell you that you are doubly bound to take the life bravely and brightly, because

you have chosen it yourself. Fortunately, yours is a nature that will develop in any surroundings. But I do want to say a word or two about your examination, and the life you have thrown aside for the time. I know you don't talk about it, but I think you will allow me to say what I feel. Preaching, you know, is an old man's privilege."

"Go on," said Mona, "talk to me. Nobody helps me but you. It does me good even to hear your voice."

CHAPTER XXVII.

A NEOPHYTE.

Once more Mona arrived at Borrowness, and once more Rachel was awaiting her at the station.

There was no illusion now about the life before her, no uncertainty, no vague visions of self-renunciation and of a vocation. All was flat, plain, shadowless prose.

"I must e'en dree my weird," she said to herself as the train drew into the station; but a bright face smiled at Rachel from the carriage-window, a light step sprang on to the platform, and a cheerful voice said—

"Well, you see I am all but true to my word; and you have no idea what a lot of pretty things I have brought with me."

"Mona," said Rachel mysteriously, as they walked down the road to the house, "I have a piece of news for you. Who do you think called?"

"I am afraid I can't guess."

"Mr Brown!"

"Did he?" said Mona rather absently.

"Yes. At first I was that put out at you being away, and I had the awfullest hurry getting on my best dress; but just

as I was showing him out, who should pass but Mrs Robertson. My word, didn't she stare! The Browns would never think of calling on her. I told him you were away visiting friends. I didn't say in London, for fear he might find out about your meaning to be a doctor."

"That would be dreadful, would not it?"

"Yes, but you needn't be afraid. He said something about its being a nice change for you to come here after teaching, and I never let on you weren't a teacher, though it was on the tip of my tongue to tell him what a nice bit of a tocher you had of your own."

"Pray don't say that to any one," said Mona rather sharply. "I have no wish to be buzzed round by a lot of raw Lubins in search of Phyllis with a tocher."

"Well, my dear, you know you're getting on. It's best to make hay while the sun shines."

"True," said Mona cynically; "but when a woman has even four hundred a year of her own, she has a good long day before her."

Early in the evening Bill arrived with Mona's boxes, and the two cousins entered with equal zest upon the work of unpacking them. "My word!" and "Well, I never!" fell alternately from Rachel's lips as treasure after treasure came to view. Ten pounds was a great sum of money, to be sure; but who would have thought that even ten pounds could buy all this? "You *are* a born shopkeeper, Mona!" she said, with genuine admiration.

Mona laughed. "Shall we advertise in the *Gazette* that 'Our Miss Maclean has just returned from a visit to London, and has brought with her a choice selection of all the novelties of the season'?" she said; but she withdrew the suggestion hastily, when she saw that Rachel was disposed to take it seriously.

"And now," she went on, "there is one thing more, not for the shop but for you;" and from shrouding sheets of tissue-paper, she unfolded a quiet, handsome fur-lined cloak.

"Oh, my goodness!" Rachel had never seen anything so magnificent in her life, and the tears stood in her eyes as she tried it on.

"It's your kindness I'm thinking of, my dear, not of the cloak," she said; "but there isn't the like of it between this and St Rules. It'll last me all my life."

Mona kissed her on the forehead, well pleased.

"And I brought a plain muff and tippet for Sally. She says she always has a cold in the winter. This is a reward to her for spending some of her wages on winter flannels, sorely against her will."

"Dear me! She will be set up. There will be no keeping her away from Bible Class and Prayer Meeting now! It is nice having you back, Mona. I can't tell you how many folk have been asking for you in the shop; there's twice as much custom since you came. Miss Moir wouldn't buy a hat till you came back to help her to choose it; and Polly Baines from the Towers brought in some patterns of cloth to ask your advice about a dress."

"Did she? How sweet of her! I hope you told her to call again. Has the Colonel's Jenny been in?"

"Oh no, it's very seldom she gets this length. Kirkstoun's nearer, and there's better shops."

"She told me there's no one to write her letters for her, since Maggie went away, and I promised to go out there before long and act the part of scribe. It was quite a weight on my mind while I was in London, but I will go as soon as I get these things arranged in the shop. Has the Colonel gone yet?"

"No; I understand he goes to his sister's to-morrow."

Most of Jenny's acquaintances gladly seized the opportunity to call on her when her master was away from home. The Colonel had the reputation of being the most outrageously eccentric man in the whole country-side, and it required courage of no common order to risk an accidental encounter with him. He might chance, of course, to be in an extremely affable humour, but it was impossible to make

sure of this beforehand; and one thing was quite certain, that the natural frankness of his intercourse with his fellow-men was not likely to be modified by any sense of tact, or even of common decency. What he thought he said, and he often delighted in saying something worse than his deliberate thought. Not many years before, his family had owned the whole of the estate on which he was now content to rent a pretty cottage, standing some miles from the sea, in a few acres of pine-wood. Here he lived for a great part of the year, alone with his quaint old housekeeper Jenny, taking no part in the social life of the neighbourhood, but calling on whom he chose, when he chose, regardless of all etiquette in the matter. Strange tales were told of him—tales to which Jenny listened in sphinx-like silence, never giving wing to a bit of gossip by so much as an "Ay" or "Nay." She had grown thoroughly accustomed to the old man's ways, and it seemed to be nothing to her if his language was as strong as his potions.

"Have a glass of whisky and water, Colonel?" Mrs Hamilton had asked one cold morning, when he dropped into her house soon after breakfast.

"Thank you, madam," he had replied, "I won't trouble you for the water."

The clever old lady was a prime favourite with him, the more so as she considered it the prescriptive right of a soldier of good family to be as outrageous as he chose.

He was a kind-hearted man, too, and fond of children, though they rarely lost their fear of him. He was reported to be "unco near," but if he met a bright-faced child whom he knew, in his favourite resort, the post-office, he would say—

"Sixpenn'orth of sweets for this young lady, Mr Dalgleish. You may put in as many more as you like from yourself, but sixpenn'orth will be from me."

Mona was somewhat curious to see the old man, as she fancied that in her childhood she had heard her father speak of him; but her time was fully occupied in the

her. "So I did,—but why do you wish me not to tell any one?"

Matilda blushed violently at the direct question, and proceeded to draw designs on the carpet of Castle Maclean with the end of her umbrella. She had intended to dispose of the matter in a few airy words; and she felt convinced still that she could have done so in her own house, or in Miss Simpson's shop, if she had chanced to see Miss Maclean alone in either place. But Mona looked so serenely and provokingly at home out here on the rocks, with the half-cut German book in her delicate white hands, that the whole affair began to assume a much more serious aspect.

Mona studied the crimson face attentively.

It had been her strong instinctive impulse to say, "My dear child, if you had not reminded me of it I should never have thought of the matter again," and so to dismiss the subject. But she was restrained from doing so by a vague recollection of her conversation with Dr Dudley about these girls. She forgot that she was supposed to be their social inferior, and remembered only that she was a woman, responsible in a greater or a less degree for every girl with whom she came in contact.

She laid her hand on her visitor's shoulder.

"You may be quite sure," she said, "that I don't want to get you into trouble, but I think you had better tell me why you wish me not to speak of this."

Mona's touch was mesmeric,—at least Matilda Cookson found it so. In all her vapid little life she had never experienced anything like the thrill that passed through her now. She would have confessed anything at that moment, and perhaps have regretted her frankness bitterly an hour later; for, after all, confession is only occasionally of moral value in itself, however priceless it may be in its results.

The story was not a particularly novel one, even to Mona's inexperienced ears. Two years before, all the girls in Miss Barnett's private school at Kirkstoun had been "in love"

with the drawing-master, who came twice a week from St Rules. His languid manner and large dark eyes had wrought havoc within the "narrowing nunnery walls," and when his work at St Rules had increased so much that he no longer required Miss Barnett's support, he had taken his departure amid much wailing and lamentation.

Matilda had gone soon after to a London boarding-school, where she had forgotten all about him; but a chance meeting at a dance, on her return, had renewed the old attraction. This first chance meeting had been followed by a number of others; and when, only a short time before, Mrs Cookson had suddenly decreed that Matilda was to go to St Rules once a week for music lessons, the temptation to create a few more "chance meetings" had proved irresistible.

Mona was rather at a loss to know what to do with the confession, now that she had got it. She knew so little of this girl. What were her gods? Had she any heroes?—any heroines?—any ideals? Was there anything in her to which one might appeal? Mona was too young herself to attack the situation with weapons less cumbrous than heavy artillery.

"How old are you?" she asked suddenly.

"Eighteen."

"And don't you mean to be a fine woman—morally a fine woman, I mean?"

"Morally a fine woman"—the words, spoken half shyly, half wistfully, were almost an unknown tongue to Matilda Cookson. Almost, but not quite. They called up vague visions of evening services, and of undefined longings for better things,—visions, more distinct, of a certain "revival," when she had become "hysterical," had stayed to the "enquiry meeting," and had professed to be "converted." She had been very happy then for a few weeks, but the happiness had not lasted long. Those things never did last; they were all pure excitement, as her father had said at the time. What was the use of raking up that old story now?

"I don't see that there was any great harm in my meeting him," she said doggedly.

"I am quite sure you did not mean any great harm; but do you know how men talk about girls who 'give themselves away,' as they call it?"

Matilda coloured. "I am sure he would not say anything horrid about me. He is awfully in love."

"Is he? I don't know much about love; but if he loves you, you surely want him to respect you. You would not like him to be a worse man for loving you,—and he must become a worse man, if he has a low opinion of women."

"You mean that I am not to meet him any more?"

"I mean that he cannot possibly respect you, while he knows you meet him without your mother's knowledge."

"And suppose I won't promise not to meet him again, what will you do?"

"I don't consider that I have the smallest right to exact a promise from you."

"Then you won't speak of this to any one, whatever happens?"

Mona smiled. "I am not quite clear that you have any right to exact a promise from me."

Matilda could not help joining in the smile. This was good fencing.

"At any rate, you have not told any one yet?"

"I have not."

"Not Miss Simpson?"

"Not any one; and therefore not Miss Simpson."

"Well, I must say it was very kind of you."

"I am afraid I ought not to accept your praise; it never occurred to me to speak of it."

"And yet you recognised me?"

Mona laughed outright—a very friendly laugh.

"And yet I recognised you."

Matilda drew the sole of her high-heeled shoe over the ground in front of her, and began an entirely new design.

"What do you mean by 'respect,' Miss Maclean? It is such a chilly word. There is no warmth or colour in it."

"There is no warmth nor colour in the air, yet air is even more essential than sunshine."

There was silence for some minutes. Matilda obliterated the new design with a little stamp of her foot.

"Long ago, when I was a girl, I began to believe in self-denial, and high ideals, and all that sort of thing. But you can't work it in with your everyday life. It is all a dream."

"A dream!" said Mona softly,—

"'No, no, by all the martyrs and the dear dead Christ!'

Everything else is a dream. That is real. That was your chance in life. You should have clung to it with both hands. Your soul is drowning now for want of it, in a sea of nothingness."

The revival preacher himself could scarcely have spoken more strongly, and Matilda felt a slight pleasurable return of the old excitement. She did not show it, however.

"It is easy to talk," she said, "but you don't know what it is to be the richest people in a place like this. Pa and Ma won't let anybody speak to us. I believe it will end in our never getting married at all. We shall be out of the wood before they find their straight stick."

"My dear child, is marriage the end of life? And even if it is, surely the girls who make good wives are those who are content to be the life and brightness of their home circle, and who are not constantly straining their eyes in search of the knight-errant who is to deliver them from Giant Irksome."

In the course of her life in London, Mona had met many girls who chafed at home duties, and longed for a 'sphere,' but a girl who longed for a husband, *quâ* husband, was so surprising an instance of atavism as to be practically a new type.

Matilda sighed. "You don't know what our home life is," she said. "We pay calls, and people call on us; we go

for proper walks along the highroad; we play on the piano and we do crewel-work; we get novels from the library,—and that is all. Just the same thing over and over again."

"And don't you care enough for books and music to find scope in them?"

Matilda shook her head. "Can you read German?" she asked abruptly, looking at Mona's book.

"Yes; do you?"

"No; and I never in my life met any one who could, unless perhaps my German teachers. I took it for three years at school, but I should not know one word in ten now. I wish I did! We had a nice row, I can tell you, when I first came home from school, and Father brought in a German letter from the office one day. He actually expected me to be able to read it!"

"You could easily learn. It only wants a little dogged resolution,—enough to worry steadily through one German story-book with a dictionary. After that the neck of the difficulty is broken."

Matilda made a grimace. "I have only got *Bilderbuch*," she said, "and I know the English of that by heart, from hearing the girls go over and over it in class. Start me off, and I can go on; but I can scarcely tell you which word stands for moon."

She was almost startled at her own frankness. She had never talked like this to any one before.

"You know I am not going to take you at your own valuation. Let me judge for myself," and Mona opened her book at the first page and held it out.

Matilda put her hands up to her face. "*Don't!*" she said. "I couldn't bear to let you see how little I know. But I will try to learn. I will begin *Bilderbuch* this very night, though I hate it as much as I do *Lycidas* and *Hamlet*, and everything else I read at school."

Mona shivered involuntarily. "Don't read anything you are sick of," she said. "If you like, I will lend you an interesting story that will tempt you on in spite of yourself."

"Thanks awfully. You are very kind."

"I shall be very glad to help you if you get into a real difficulty." Mona paused. "As I said before, I have no right to exact a promise from you—but I can't tell you how much more highly I should think of you if you did worry on to the end."

The conclusion of this sentence took Matilda by surprise. She had imagined that Mona was going back to the subject of the drawing-master, but Mona seemed to have forgotten the existence of everything but German books.

"And may I come here sometimes in the afternoon, and talk to you? I often see you go down to the beach."

"I never know beforehand when I shall be able to come; but, if you care to take the chance, I shall always be glad to see you."

"The new Adam will," she said to herself, with a half-amused, half-rueful smile, when her visitor had gone, "but the old Adam will have a tussle for his rights."

A moment later Matilda reappeared, shy and awkward.

"Would you mind telling me again that thing you said about the martyrs?"

Mona smiled. "If you wait a moment, I will write it down for you;" and, tearing a leaf from her note-book, she wrote out the whole verse—

> "No, no, by all the martyrs and the dear dead Christ;
> By the long bright roll of those whom joy enticed
> With her myriad blandishments, but could not win,
> Who would fight for victory, but would not sin."

Matilda read it through, and then carefully folded the paper. In doing so she noticed some writing on the back, and read aloud—

"Lady Munro, Poste Restante, Cannes." "Who is Lady Munro?" she asked, with unintentional rudeness.

"She is my aunt. I did not know her address was written there." Mona tore off the name, and handed back the slip of paper.

"Lady Munro your aunt, and you live with Miss Simpson?"

"Why not? Miss Simpson is my cousin."

"Miss Maclean, if I had a 'Lady' for my aunt, everybody should know it. I don't believe I should even travel in a railway carriage, without the other passengers finding it out."

Mona laughed. "I have already told you that I don't mean to take you at your own valuation. In point of fact, I had much rather the people here knew nothing about Lady Munro. I should not like others to draw comparisons between her and Miss Simpson."

"I beg your pardon. I did not mean——"

"Oh, I know you did not mean any harm. It was my own stupidity; but, as I say, I should not like others to talk of it. *Auf Wiedersehen!*"

Alone once more, Mona clasped her hands behind her head, and looked out over the sea.

"Well, playfellow," she said, "have I done good or harm? At the present moment, as she walks home, she does not know whether to venerate or to detest me. It is an even chance which way the scale will turn. And is it all an affair of infinite importance, or does it not matter one whit?"

This estimate of Matilda's state of mind was a shrewd one, except for one neglected item. Now that the moment of impulse was over, the balance might have been even; but Lady Munro's name had turned the scale, and Matilda 'venerated' her new friend. Mona's strong and vivid personality would have made any one forget in her presence that she was 'only a shop-girl'; but no power on earth could prevent the recollection from returning—perhaps with renewed force—when her immediate influence was withdrawn. If a man of culture like Dr Dudley could not wholly ignore the fact of her social inferiority, how much less was it possible to an empty little soul like Matilda Cookson? for she was one of those people to whose moral and spiritual

progress an earthly crutch is absolutely essential. She never forgot that conversation at Castle Maclean; but the two things that in after years stood out most clearly in her memory were the quotation about the martyrs, and Mona's relationship to Lady Munro. And surely this is not so strange? Do not even the best of us stand with one foot on the eternal rock, and the other on the shifting sands of time?

"How odd that she should be struck by that quotation!" mused Mona. "I wonder what Dr Dudley would say if he knew that the notes of the Pilgrims' Chorus, rising clear, steady, and unvarying above all the noises of the world, appealed even to the stupid little ears of Matilda Cookson. If the mother is no more than he says, there must be some good stuff in the father. *Ex nihilo, nihil fit.*"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE COLONEL'S YARN.

The next morning brought Mona a budget of letters on the subject of Lucy's visit to the Riviera. Lady Munro had risen to the occasion magnificently. "If your friend is in the least like you," she wrote, "I shall be only too glad to have her as a companion for Evelyn. I have written to ask her to be my guest for a month, and the sooner she comes the better."

"I have only known you for a few years," wrote Lucy, "and I seem to have grown tired of saying that I don't know how to thank you. It will be nuts for me to go to Cannes, without feeling that my father is living on hasty-pudding at home; and it will be a great thing to be with people like the Munros; but if they expect that I am going to live up to your level, I shall simply give up the ghost at once. I have

written to assure them that I am an utter and unmitigated fraud; but do you tell them the same, in case there should be bloodshed on my arrival.

"As for your dear letter and enclosure, I handed them straight over to Father, and asked him what I was to do. He read the letter twice through carefully, and then gave me back—the bank-note only! 'Keep it,' he said briefly; and I fancied—I say I *fancied*—that there was a suspicious dimness about his eyes. You have indeed made straight tracks for the Pater's heart, Mistress Mona, if he allows his daughter to accept twenty pounds from you.

"Allowing for all the expenses of the journey, I find I can afford two gowns and a hat, and much anxious thought the selection has given me, I assure you. One thing I have absolutely settled on,—a pale sea-green Liberty silk, with suggestions of foam; and when I decided on that, I came simultaneously to another decision, that life is worth living after all.

"I only wish I felt perfectly sure that you could afford it, darling. You told me you were getting nothing new for yourself this winter, &c., &c."

Finally, there was a little note from Mr Reynolds to his "elder daughter,"—a note in no way remarkable for originality, yet full of that personal, life-giving influence which is worth a thousand brilliant aphorisms.

Mona was very busy in the shop that morning, but in her spare minutes she contrived to write a letter to Lucy.

"I do not wish to put you in an awkward position," she wrote, "but I think you have sufficient ingenuity and resource to keep me out of difficulties also. You know that when I promised to go to my cousin, I had not even seen the Munros. I met them immediately afterwards; and our intimacy has ripened so rapidly that I should not now think it right to take an important step in life without at least letting them know. I mean to tell them ultimately about my winter in Borrowness; but nothing they could say would alter my opinion of my obligation to remain here, and

I think I am justified in wishing to avoid useless friction in the meantime. You can imagine what the situation would be, if Sir Douglas were to appear in the shop some fine morning, and demand my instant return to civilised life. He is quite capable of doing it, and I am very anxious if possible to avoid such a clumsy *dénouement*. You will see at a glance how inartistic it would be.

"You will tell me that it is absolutely impossible to conceal the truth, but I do not think you will find it so when you get to Cannes. It is very doubtful whether you will see Sir Douglas at all,—he is looking forward so much to the pheasant-shooting; and Lady Munro is not the person to ask questions except in a general sort of way. She exists far too gracefully for that. You can honestly say, if needful, that I am very busy, but that I have not yet returned to town; I don't think you will find it necessary to say even that.

"But show me up a thousand times over rather than sail nearer the wind than your conscience approves. I merely state the position, and I know you will appreciate my difficulty quite as fully as I do myself.

"Please don't have the smallest scruple about accepting the money. When I told you I was 'on the rocks,' I did not mean it in the sense in which a young man about town would use the expression. My debts did not amount to more than twenty or thirty pounds. All things in life are relative, you see. I spent nothing in Norway, and my cousin will not hear of my paying for my board here. She is kind enough to say that, even pecuniarily, she is richer since I came. Of course I do not want any more gowns; I go nowhere, and see no one. Doris tells me she is studying medicine—by proxy. I am glad to think that I shall be shining in society this winter—also by proxy. I hope I may have the good fortune to see you in your new *rôle* of mermaid before the run is over. I am sure it will be a very successful one.

"Please give your father my most dutiful love, and tell him that I will answer his kind note in a day or two."

The writing of this letter, together with a few grateful lines to Lady Munro, occupied all Mona's spare time before dinner; and as soon as the unbeautiful meal was over, she set off at last to the Colonel's wood.

"If the scale has turned against me, Matilda Cookson will not go to Castle Maclean," she reflected. "If it has turned in my favour, it will do her no harm to look for me in vain."

She had to walk in to Kirkstoun, and then strike up country for two or three miles; but before she had proceeded far on her way, she met Mr Brown.

"So you have got back," he said, looking very shy and uncomfortable.

"Yes, I have been back for some days."

"How is Miss Simpson?"

"She is very well, thank you."

"Were you going anywhere in particular?"

"I am going to Barntoun Wood, but don't let me take you out of your way," she said.

He did not answer, but walked by her side into town.

"Do you take ill with the smell of tobacco?" he asked, taking his pipe from his pocket.

"Not in the least."

"Have you been doing any more botanising?"

"I have not had time. Thank you so much for sending me that box of treasures. Some of them interested me greatly."

"I thought you would like them. Will you be able to come again some day, and hunt for yourself?"

"Is not it getting too late in the year?"

"Not for the mosses and lichens and sea-weeds. Have you gone into them at all?"

"Not a bit. They must be extremely interesting, but very difficult."

"Oh, you get hold of the thread in time, especially with the mosses. The Algæ and Fungi are a tremendous subject of course. One can only work a bit on the borders of it.

But if you care to come for a few more rambles, I could soon show you the commonest things we have, and a few of the rarer ones."

"I should like it immensely. Could your sister come with us?"

"Oh yes; she was not really tired that day. It was just that her boot was too tight. I had a laugh at her when we got home."

"Well, I suppose we part company here. I am going out to Colonel Lawrence's."

"I am not doing anything particular this afternoon. I could walk out with you."

The words were commonplace, but something in his manner startled Mona.

As regarded the gift of utterance, Mr Brown was not many degrees removed from the dumb creation. He could discuss a cashmere with the traveller, a right-of-way with a fellow-townsman, or a bit of local gossip with his sisters. He could talk botany to a clever young woman, and he could blurt out in honest English the fact that he wanted her to be his wife; but of love-making as an art, of the delicate *crescendo* by which women are won in spite of themselves, he was as ignorant as a child. It was natural and easy to his mind to make one giant stride from botany to marriage; and it never occurred to him that the woman might require a few of those stepping-stones which developing passion usually creates for the lover, and which *savoir vivre* teaches the man of the world to place deliberately.

"Thank you very much," said Mona; "but I could not think of troubling you. I am well used to going about alone." She held out her hand, but, as he did not immediately take it, she bowed cordially, and left him helplessly watching her retreating figure.

She passed the museum, and, leaving the town behind her, walked out among the fields. Most of the corn had been gathered in, but a few stooks still remained here and there to break the monotony of the stubble-grown acres. Trees

in that district were so rare that one scraggy sycamore by the roadside had been christened Balmarnie Tree, and served as an important landmark; while, for many miles around, the Colonel's tiny wood stood out as a feature of the landscape, the little freestone cottage peeping from beneath the dark shade of the pines like a rabbit from its burrow.

"It seems to me, my dear," she said to herself, "that you are rather a goose. Are you only seventeen, may I ask, that you should be alarmed by a conversation from Ollendorf? But all the same, if Miss Brown's shoe pinches her next time, my shoe shall pinch me too."

She passed Wester and Easter Barntoun, the two large farms that constituted the greater part of the estate; and then a quarter of an hour's walk brought her to Barntoun Wood. A few small cottar-houses stood within a stone's-throw of the gate, but the place seemed curiously lonely to be the chosen home of an old man of the world. Yet there could be no doubt that it was a gentleman's residence. A well-trained beech hedge surmounted the low stone dyke, from whose moss-grown crannies sprang a forest of polypody, and a few graceful fronds of wild maidenhair. The carriage-drive was smooth and well kept, but, on leaving it, one plunged at once into the shade of the trees, with generations of pine-needles under foot, and the weird cooing of wood-pigeons above one's head. Mona longed to explore those mysterious recesses, but there was no time for that to-day. She walked straight up to the house and knocked.

She was met in the doorway by the quaintest old man she had ever beheld. His clean-shaven face was a network of wrinkles, and he wore a nut-brown wig surmounted by a red night-cap.

"Who are you?" he asked abruptly.

"I am Mona Maclean." Some curious impulse prompted her to add, for the first time during her stay at Borrowness, not "Miss Simpson's cousin," but, "Gordon Maclean's daughter."

He seized her almost roughly by the shoulder, and turned her face to the light.

"By Gad, so you are!" he exclaimed, "though you are not so bonny as your mother was before you. But come in, come in; and tell me all about it."

He opened the door of an old-fashioned, smoke-seasoned parlour, and Mona went in.

"But I did not mean to disturb you," she said. "I came to see Jenny."

"Tut, tut, sit down, sit down! Jenny, damn ye, come and put a spunk to this fire. There's a young lady here."

The old woman came in, bobbing to Mona as she passed. She was not at all surprised to see Miss Simpson's assistant in her master's parlour. One of Jenny's chief qualifications for her post of housekeeper was the fact that she had long ceased to speculate about the Colonel's vagaries.

"I wonder what I have got that I can offer you?" said the old man meditatively. He unlocked a small sideboard, produced from it some rather mouldy sweet biscuits, and poured out a glass of wine.

"That's lady's wine," he said, "so you need not be afraid of it. It's not what I drink myself." He laughed, and, helping himself to a small glass of whisky, he looked across at his visitor.

"Here's to old times and Gordon Maclean!" he said, "the finest fellow that ever kept open house at Rangoon," and he tossed off the whisky at a gulp.

Mona drank the toast, and smiled through a sudden and blinding mist of tears. It was meat and drink to her to hear her father's praise even on lips like these.

"Come, come, don't fret," said the Colonel kindly. "He was a fine fellow, as I say, but I think he knew the way to heaven all the same."

"I am quite sure of that."

"That's right, that's right. Where are you stopping—the Towers?—Balnamora?"

"No, no; I am staying at Borrowness, with my cousin Miss Simpson."

He stared at her blankly.

"Miss Simpson?" he said, "Rachel Simpson!" His jaw dropped, and, throwing back his head on the top of his chair, he burst into an unpleasant laugh.

"Your father was a rich man, though he died young," he said, recovering himself suddenly. "He must have left you a tidy little portion."

"So he did," said Mona. "Things were sadly mismanaged after his death; but in the end I got what was quite sufficient for me."

"You have had a good education?—learned to sing, and parley-voo, and"—he ran his fingers awkwardly up and down the table—"this sort of thing?"

Mona laughed. "Yes," she said, "I have learned all that."

He puffed away at his pipe for a time in silence.

"Why are you not with the Munros?" he said abruptly. "With Munro's eye for a pretty young woman, too!"

"The Munros took me to Norway this summer. Sir Douglas is kindness itself, and so is Lady Munro; but Miss Simpson is my cousin."

He laughed again, the same discordant laugh.

"Drink your wine, Miss Maclean," he said, "and I will spin you a bit of a yarn. Maybe some of it will be news to you.

"A great many years before you were born, my grandfather was the laird of all this property. Your father's people, the Macleans, were tenants on the estate—respectable, well-to-do tenants, in a small way. Your grandfather was a remarkable man, cut out for success from his cradle, —always at the top of his class at school, don't you know? always keen to know what made the wheels go round, always ready to touch his hat to the ladies. His only brother, Sandy, was a ne'er-do-weel who never came to anything, but your grandfather soon became a rich man. There were two

sisters, and each took after one of the brothers, so to say. Margaret was a fine, strapping, fair-spoken wench; Ann was a poor fusionless thing, who married the first man that asked her. Margaret never married. The best grain often stands.

"Your grandfather had, let me see, three children—two boys and a girl. A boy and girl died. It was a sad story—you'll know all about it?—fine healthy children, too! But your father was a chip of the old block. He had a first-rate education, and then he went to India and made a great name for himself. I never knew a man like him. People opened their hearts and homes to him wherever he went. Not a door that was closed to him, and yet he never forgot an old friend. Well, the first time he came home, like the gentleman he was, he must needs look up his people here. Most of them were dead. Sandy had gone to Australia; there were only Ann's children, Rachel Simpson and her sister Jane. Jane had married a small shopkeeper, and had a boy and girl of her own. They were very poor, so he made each of them a yearly allowance.

"Well, he was visiting with his young wife at a house not a hundred miles from here, and the two of them were the life of the party. I know all about it, because I came to stay at the house myself a day or two before they left. After they had gone—*after they had gone*, mark ye!—who should come to call at the house in all their war-paint but Rachel Simpson and her sister! And, by Jove! they were a queerish couple. Rachel had notions of her own about dress in those days, I can tell you."

Mona blushed crimson. No one who knew Rachel could have much doubt that the story was true.

"They announced themselves as 'Gordon Maclean's cousins,' and of course they were civilly received; but the footman got orders that if they called again his mistress was not at home. I had a pretty good inkling that Maclean was providing them with funds, so I thought it only right to tip him a wink. He took it amazingly well—he *was* a good fellow!—but I believe he gave his fair cousins pretty

plainly to understand that, though he was willing to share his money, his friends were his own till he chose to introduce them. I never heard of their playing that little game again, for, after all, the funds were of even more importance than the high connections. But they never forgave your father. They always thought that he might have pulled them up the ladder with him—ha, ha, ha! a pretty fair weight they would have been!"

Mona did not laugh. Nothing could make the least difference now, but she did wish she had heard this story before.

"You did not know old Simpy in your father's time?"

Mona hesitated. She was half inclined to resent the insulting diminutive, but what was the use? The Colonel took liberties with every one, and perhaps he could tell her more.

"No," she said. "I vaguely knew that I had a cousin, but I never thought much about it till she wrote to me a few years ago."

"The deuce she did! To borrow money, I'll be bound. That nephew of hers was a regular sink for money, till he and his mother died. But Simpy should be quite a millionaire now. She has the income your father settled on her, and a little money besides—let alone the shop! She is not sponging on you now, I hope?"

"Oh no," said Mona warmly. "On the contrary, I am staying here as her guest."

He burst out laughing again.

"Rather you than me!" he said. "But well you may; it is all your father's money, first or last."

Mona rose to go.

"I am glad you have told me all this," she said, "though it is rather depressing."

"Depressing? Hoot, havers! It will teach you how to treat Rachel Simpson for the future. I have a likeness of your father and mother here. Would you like to see it?"

"Very much indeed. It may be one I have never seen."

He took up a shabby old album, and turned his back while he found the place; but a page must have slipped over by accident in his shaky old hands, for when Mona looked she beheld only a vision of long white legs and flying gauzy petticoats.

"Damnation!" shouted the old man, and snatching the book away, he hastily corrected his mistake.

It was all right this time. No living faces were so familiar to Mona as were those of the earnest, capable man, and the beautiful, queenly woman in the photograph.

"I have never seen this before," she said. "It is very good."

"I'll leave it to you in my will, eh? It will be worth as much as most of my legacies."

"If everything you leave is as much valued as that will be, your legatees will have much to be grateful for."

The old face furrowed up into a broad smile. "Well," he said, "I start for London to-night, but I hope we may meet again. I'll send Jenny in to see you. We are good comrades, she and I—we never enquire into each other's affairs."

Mona found it rather difficult to give her full attention to Jenny's letters, interesting and characteristic as these were. One was addressed to a sailor brother; another to Maggie, and the latter was not at all unlike a quaint paraphrase of Polonius's advice to his son. The poor woman's mind was apparently ill at ease about the child of her old age.

"I suld hae keepit her by me," she said. "She's ower young tae fend for hersel'; but it was a guid place, an' she was that keen tae gang, puir bit thing!"

"I do think it would be well if you could get her a good place somewhere in the neighbourhood," said Mona; "and I should not think it would be difficult."

"Ay, but she maun bide her year. It's an ill beginning tae shift ere the twel'month's oot. We maun e'en thole."

But Jenny forgot her forebodings in her admiration of Mona's handwriting.

"I can maist read it mysel'," she said. "Ye write lood oot, like the print i' the big Bible."

CHAPTER XXIX.

"YONDER SHINING LIGHT."

Miss Simpson's shop had undeniably become one of the lions of Borrowness. An advertisement in the *Kirkstoun Gazette* would have been absolutely useless, compared with the rumour which ran from mouth to mouth, and which brought women of all classes to see the novelties for themselves. Rachel had to double and treble her orders when the traveller came round, and it soon became quite impossible for her and Mona to leave the shop at the same time.

"I find it a little difficult to do as you asked me about reading," Mona wrote to Mr Reynolds, "for the shop-keeping really has become hard work, calling for all one's resources; and my cousin naturally expects me to be sociable for a couple of hours in the evening. I keenly appreciate, however, what you said about beginning the work leisurely, and leaving a minimum of strain to the end; so I make it a positive duty to read for one hour a-day, and, as a general rule, the hour runs on to two. When my six months here are over, I will take a short holiday, and then put myself into a regular tread-mill till July; and I will do my very best to pass. What you said to me that night is perfectly true. I have read too much *con amore*, going as far afield as my fancy led me, and neglecting the old principle of 'line upon line; precept upon precept.' It certainly has been my experience, that *wisdom* comes, but *knowledge* lingers; and I mean this time, as a Glasgow professor says, to stick to a policy of limited liability, and learn nothing that will not pay. That is what the examiners want, and they shall not have to tell me so a third time!

"Forgive this bit of pique. It is an expiring flame. I don't really cherish one atom of resentment in my heart. I

admit that I was honestly beaten by the rules of the game; and, from the point of view of the vanquished, there is nothing more to be said. I will try to leave no more loose ends in my life, if I can help it, and I assure you my resolution in this respect is being subjected to a somewhat stern test here.

"It was very wise and very kind of you to make me talk the whole subject out. I should not be so hard and priggish as I am, if, like Lucy, I had had a father."

One morning when Rachel was out, three elderly ladies entered the shop. They were short, thick-set, sedate, unobtrusively dignified, and at a first glance they all looked exactly alike. At a second glance, however, certain minor points of difference became apparent. One had black cannon-curls on each side of her face; one wore an eyeglass; and the third was easily differentiated by the total absence of all means of differentiation.

"I hear Miss Simpson has got a remarkable collection of new things," said the one with the curls.

"Not at all remarkable, I fear," said Mona, smiling. "But she has got a number of fresh things from London. If you will sit down, I will show you anything you care to see."

If Mona was brusque and cavalier in her treatment of her fellow-students, nothing could exceed the gentle respect with which she instinctively treated women older than herself. She had that inborn sense of the privileges and rights of age which is perhaps the rarest and most lovable attribute of youth.

The ladies remained for half an hour, and they spent three-and-sixpence.

"I think I have seen you sometimes at the Baptist Chapel," said the one with the eyeglass, as they rose to go.

"Yes, I have been there sometimes with my cousin."

"Have you been baptised?" asked the one who had no distinguishing feature.

"Oh yes!" said Mona, rather taken aback by the question.

"I notice you don't stay to the Communion," said the one with the curls.

"I was baptised in the Church of England."

"Oh!" said all three at once, in a tone that made Mona feel herself an utter fraud.

"You must have a talk with Mr Stuart," said the one with the eyeglass, recovering herself first. Every one agreed that she was the "cliverest" of the sisters.

"Yes," said the others, catching eagerly at a method of reconciling Christian charity and fidelity to principle; and, with enquiries after Miss Simpson, they left the shop.

"It would be the Miss Bonthrons," said Rachel, when she heard Mona's description of the new customers. "They are a great deal looked up to in Kirkstoun. Their father was senior deacon in the Baptist Chapel for years, and the pulpit was all draped with black when he died. He has left them very well provided for, too."

Meanwhile Matilda Cookson had found an object in life, and was happy. It was well for her that her enthusiastic devotion to Mona was weighted by the ballast of conscientious work, or her last state might have been worse than her first. As it was, she laboured hard, and when her family enquired the cause of her sudden fit of diligence, she took a pride in looking severely mysterious. Miss Maclean was a princess in disguise, and she was the sole custodian of the great secret. The constant effort to refrain from confiding it, even to her sister, was, in its way, as valuable a bit of moral discipline as was the laborious translation of the *Geier-Wally*.

"I would have come sooner," she said one day to Mona at Castle Maclean, "but my people can't see why I want to walk on the beach at this time of year, and it is so difficult to get rid of Clarinda. Of course if they knew you were Lady Munro's niece they would be only too glad that I should meet you anywhere, but I have not breathed a syllable of that."

She spoke with pardonable pride. She had not yet learned to spare Mona's feelings, and the latter sighed involuntarily.

"Thank you," she said; "but I don't want you to meet me 'on the sly.'"

"I thought of that. Mother would not be at all pleased at my getting to know you as things are, or as she thinks they are; but if there was a row, and she found out that you were Lady Munro's niece, she would more than forgive me. You will tell people who you are some time, won't you?"

For, after all, in what respect is a princess in disguise better than other people, if the story has no *dénouement*?

"I wish very much," said Mona patiently, "that you would try to see the matter from my point of view. I have taken no pains to prevent people from finding out who my other relatives are; but, as a matter of personal taste, I prefer that they should not talk of it. Besides, it is just as unpleasant to me to be labelled Lady Munro's niece, as to be labelled Miss Simpson's cousin. People who really care for me, care for myself."

Matilda had been straining her eyes in the direction of "yonder shining light," and she certainly thought she saw it. The difficulty was to keep it in view when she was talking to her mother or Clarinda.

"You know I care for you yourself," she said. "I don't think I ever cared for anybody so much in my life."

"Hush-sh! It is not wise to talk like that when you know me so little. If the scale turns, you will hate me all the more because you speak so strongly now."

"*Hate you!*" laughed Matilda, with the sublime confidence of eighteen.

"How goes *Geier-Wally?*"

Mona had a decided gift for teaching, and the next half-hour passed pleasantly for both of them. Then, in a very shamefaced way, Matilda drew a letter from her pocket. "I wanted to tell you," she said, "I have been writing to—to—my friend."

Her face turned crimson as she spoke. She had met

Mona several times, but this was the first reference either of them had made to the original subject of debate.

"Have you?" said Mona quietly.

'Yes. Would you mind reading the letter? I should like to know if there is anything I ought to alter."

Mona read the letter. It was headed by a showy crest and address-stamp, and it was without exception the most pathetic and the most ridiculous production she had ever seen. It was very long, and very sentimental; it made repeated reference to "your passionate love"; and, to Mona's horror, it wound up with the line about the martyrs.

However, it had one saving feature. Between the beginning and the end, Matilda did contrive to give expression to the conviction that she had done wrong in meeting her correspondent, and to the determination that she never would do it again. Compared with this everything else mattered little.

"Is that what you would have said?" she asked eagerly, as Mona finished reading it.

"It would be valueless if it were," said Mona, smiling. "He wants your views, not mine. But in quoting that line you are creating for yourself a lofty tradition that will not always be easy to live up to. I speak to myself as much as to you, for it was I who set you the example—for evil or good. You and I burn our boats when we allow ourselves to repeat a line like that."

"I want to burn them," said Matilda eagerly, only half understanding what was in Mona's mind. "I am quite sure you have burned yours. Then you don't want me to write it over again?"

"No," said Mona reflectively. "You have said definitely what you intended to say, and few girls could have done as much under the circumstances. Moreover, you have said it in your own way, and that is better than saying it in some one else's way. No, I would not write it over again."

"Thanks awfully. I am very glad you think it will do.

It is a great weight off my mind to have it done. I owe a great deal to you, Miss Maclean."

"I owe you a great deal," said Mona, colouring. "You have taught me a lesson against hasty judgment. When you came into the shop to buy blue ribbon, I certainly did not think you capable of that amount of moral pluck," and she glanced at the letter on Matilda's lap.

"What you must have thought of us!" exclaimed Matilda, blushing in her turn. "Two stuck-up, provincial—cats! Tell me, Miss Maclean, did Dr Dudley know then—what I know about you?"

Matilda was progressing. She saw that Mona winced at the unceasing reference to Lady Munro, so she attempted a periphrasis.

"He does not know now."

"Then I shall like Dr Dudley as long as I live. He is sarcastic and horrid, but he must be one of the people you were talking of the other day who see the invisible."

For Mona had got into the way of giving utterance to her thoughts almost without reserve when Matilda Cookson was with her. It was pleasant to see the look of rapt attention on the girl's face, and Mona did not realise—or realising, she did not care—how little her companion understood. Mona's talk ought to have been worth listening to in those days when her life was so destitute of companionship; but the harvest of her thought was carried away by the winds and the waves, and only a few stray gleanings fell into the eager outstretched hands of Matilda Cookson. Yet the girl was developing, as plants develop on a warm damp day in spring, and Mona was unspeakably grateful to her. The Colonel's story had not interfered with Mona's determination to "take up each day with both hands, and live it with all her might;" but it certainly had not made it any easier to see the ideal in the actual. Here, however, was one little human soul who clung to her, depended on her, learnt from her; and it would have been difficult to determine on which side the balance of benefit really lay.

CHAPTER XXX.

MR STUART'S TROUBLES.

Very slowly the days and weeks went by, but at last the end of November drew near. The coast was bleak and cold now, and it was only on exceptionally fine days that Mona could spend a quiet hour at Castle Maclean. When she escaped from the shop she went for a scramble along the coast; and when physical exercise was insufficient to drive away the cobwebs, she walked out to the Colonel's wood to see old Jenny, or, farther still, beyond Kilwinnie to have a chat with Auntie Bell.

With the latter she struck up quite a cordial friendship, and she had the doubtful satisfaction of hearing the Colonel's yarn corroborated in Auntie Bell's quaint language.

"Rachel's queer, ye ken," said Auntie Bell, as Mona took her farewell in the exquisitely kept, old-fashioned garden. "She's a' for the kirk and the prayer-meetin'; an' yet she's aye that keen tae forgather wi' her betters."

"She wants to make the best of both worlds, I suppose," said Mona. "Poor soul! I am afraid she has not succeeded very well as regards this one."

"Na," said Auntie Bell tersely. "An' between wersels, I hae ma doots o' the ither."

Mona laughed. It was curious how she and Auntie Bell touched hands across all the oceans that lay between them.

"Are ye muckle ta'en up wi' this 'gran' bazaar,' as they ca' it?"

"Not a bit," said Mona; "I hate bazaars."

"Eh, but we're o' ae mind there!" and Auntie Bell clapped her hands with sufficient emphasis to start an upward rush of crows from the field beyond the hedge.

Nearly half the county at this time was talking of one thing and of only one—the approaching bazaar at Kirkstoun.

It was almost incredible to Mona that so trifling an event should cause so much excitement; but bazaars, like earthquakes, vary in importance according to the part of the world in which they occur.

And this was no sale for church or chapel, at which the men could pretend to sneer, and which a good burgher might consistently refuse to attend; it was essentially the bazaar of the stronger sex—except in so far as the weaker sex did all the work in connection with; it was for no less an object than the new town hall.

For many years the inhabitants of Kirkstoun had felt that their town hall was a petty, insignificant building, out of all proportion to the size and importance of the burgh; and after much deliberation they had decided on the bold step of erecting a new building, and of looking mainly to Providence—spelt with a capital, of course—for the funds.

All this, however, was now rapidly becoming a matter of ancient history; the edifice had been complete for some time; about one-third of the expense had been defrayed; and, in order that the debt might be cleared off with a clean sweep, the ladies of the town had "kindly consented" to hold a bazaar.

"Man's extremity is woman's opportunity" had been the graceful, if not original, remark of one of the local bailies; but men are proverbially ungrateful, and this view of the matter had not been the only one mooted.

"Kindly consented, indeed!" one carping spirit had growled. "Pretty consent any of you would have given if it had not been an opportunity for dressing yourselves up and having a ploy. Whose pockets is all the money to come out of first or last? That's what I would like to know!"

It is quite needless to remark that the first of these speeches had been made on the platform, the second in domestic privacy.

Like wildfire the enthusiasm had spread. All through the summer, needles had flown in and out; paint-brushes had been flourished somewhat wildly; cupboards had been

ransacked; begging-letters had been written to friends all over the country, and to every man who, in the memory of the inhabitants, had left Kirkstoun to make his fortune "abroad."

It was very characteristic of "Kirkstoun folk" that not many of these letters had been written in vain. Kirkstoun men are clannish. Scatter as they may over the whole known world, they stand together shoulder to shoulder like a well-trained regiment.

The bazaar was to be held for three days before Christmas, and was to be followed by a grand ball. Was not this excitement enough to fill the imagination of every girl for many miles around? The matrons had a harder time of it, as they usually have, poor souls! With them lay the solid responsibility of getting together a sufficiency of work—and alas for all the jealousies and heart-burnings this involved!—with them lay the planning of ball-dresses that were to cost less, and look better, than any one else's; with them lay the necessity of coaxing and conciliating "your papa."

Rachel Simpson was not a person of sufficient social importance to be a stall-holder, or a receiver of goods; and she certainly was not one of those women who are content to work that others may shine, so Mona had taken little or no interest in the projected bazaar.

One morning, however, she received a letter from Doris which roused her not a little.

"Kirkstoun is somewhere near Borrowness, is it not?" wrote her friend. "If so, I shall see you before Christmas. Those friends of mine at St Rules, to whom you declined an introduction, have a stall at the Town Hall bazaar, and I am going over to assist them. It is a kind of debt, for they helped me with my last enterprise of the kind, but I should contrive to get out of it except for the prospect of seeing you.

"You will come to the bazaar, of course: I should think you would be ready for a little dissipation by that time; and I will promise to be merciful if you will visit my stall."

"How delightful!" was Mona's first thought; "how dis-

gusting!" was her second; "how utterly out of keeping Doris will be with me and my surroundings!" was her conclusion. "Ponies and pepper-pots do not harmonise very well with shops and poor relations. But, fortunately, the situation is not of my making."

She was still meditating over the letter when Rachel came in looking flushed and excited.

"Mona," she said, "I have made a nice little engagement for you. You know you say you like singing?"

"Yes," said Mona, with an awful premonition of what might be coming.

"I met Mr Stuart on the Kirkstoun road just now. He was that put about! Two of his best speakers for the *soirée* to-night have fallen through, he says. Mr Roberts has got the jaundice, and Mr Dowie has had to go to the funeral of a friend. Mr Stuart said the whole thing would be a failure, and he was fairly at his wits' end. You see there's no time to do anything now. He said if he could get a song or a recitation, or anything, it would do; so of course I told him you were a fine singer, and I was sure you would give us a song. You should have seen how his face brightened up. 'Capital!' said he; 'I have noticed her singing in church. Perhaps she would give us "I know that my Redeemer liveth," or something of that kind?'"

"My dear cousin," said Mona, at last finding breath to speak, "you might just as well ask me to give a performance on the trapeze. I have never *sung* since I was in Germany. It is one thing to chirp to you in the firelight, and quite another to stand up on a public platform and perform. The thing is utterly absurd."

"Hoots," said Rachel, "they are not so particular. Many's the time I have seen them pleased with worse singing than yours."

Then ensued the first 'stand-up fight' between the two. As her cousin waxed hotter Mona waxed cooler, and finally she ended the discussion by setting out to speak to Mr Stuart herself.

She found him in his comfortable study, his slippered feet on the fender, and a polemico-religious novel in his hand.

"I am sorry to find my cousin has made an engagement for me this evening," she said. "It is quite impossible for me to fulfil it."

"Oh, nonsense!" he said kindly. "It is too late to withdraw now. Your name is in the programme," and he glanced at the neatly written paper on his writing-table, as if it had been a legal document at the least. "My wife is making copies of that for all the speakers. You can't draw back now."

"It might be too late to withdraw," said Mona, "if I had ever put myself forward; but, although my cousin meant to act kindly to every one concerned, she and I are two distinct people."

"Come, come! Of course I quite understand your feeling a little shy, if you are not used to singing in public; but you will be all right as soon as you begin. I remember my first sermon—what a state I was in, to be sure! And yet they told me it was a great success."

"I am very sorry," said Mona. "It is not mere nervousness and shyness—though there is that too, of course—it is simply that I am not qualified to do it."

"We are not very critical. There won't be more than three persons present who know good singing from bad."

"Unfortunately I should wish to sing for those three."

"Ah," he said, with a curl of his lip, "you must have appreciation. The lesson some of us have got to learn in life, Miss Maclean, is to do without appreciation." He paused, but her look of sudden interest was inviting. "One is tempted sometimes to think that one could speak to so much more purpose in a world where there is some intellectual life, where people are not wholly blind to the problems of the day; but to preach Sunday after Sunday to those who have no eyes to see, no ears to hear, to suppress one's best thoughts——"

He stopped short.

"It is a pity surely to do that, unless one is a prophet indeed."

"Ah," he said, "you cannot understand my position. It is a singular one, unique perhaps.—You will sing for us to-night?"

"Mr Stuart," said Mona, struggling against the temptation to speak sharply, "I should not have left my work to come here in the busiest time of the day, if I had been prepared to yield in the end. And indeed why should I? There are plenty of people in the neighbourhood who sing as well as I; and people who are well known have a right to claim a little indulgence. I have none. It is not even as if I were a member of the Chapel."

"I hope you will be soon."

"Well," said Mona, rising with a smile, "you have more pressing claims on your attention at present than my conversion to Baptist principles. Good morning."

"Yes," he said reproachfully, "I must go out in this rain, and try to beat up a substitute for you. A country minister's life is no sinecure, Miss Maclean; and his work is doubled when he feels the necessity of keeping pace with the times." He glanced at the book he had laid down.

"I suppose so," said Mona, somewhat hypocritically. She longed to make a very different reply, but she was glad to escape on any terms. "I wish you all success in your search. You will not go far before you find a fitter makeshift than I."

"I doubt it," he said, going with her to the door. "Did any young lady's education ever yet fit her to do a thing frankly and gracefully, when she was asked to do it?"

Mona sighed. "Education is a long word, Mr Stuart,' she said. "It savours more of eternity than of time. 'So many worlds, so much to do.' If we should meet in another life, perhaps I shall be able to sing for you then."

He was absolutely taken aback. What did she mean? Was she really poaching in his preserves? It was his

privilege surely to give the conversation a religious turn, and he did not see exactly how she had contrived to do it. However, it was his duty to rise to the occasion, even although the effort might involve a severe mental dislocation.

"I hope we shall sing together there," he said, "with crowns on our heads, and palms in our hands."

It was Mona's turn to be taken aback. She had not realised the effect of her unconventional remarks, when tried by a conventional standard.

"*Behüte Gott!*" she said as she made her way home in the driving rain. "There are worse fates conceivable than annihilation."

Rachel was severely dignified all day, but she was anxious that Mona should go with her to the *soirée*, so she was constrained to bury the hatchet before evening. Mona was much relieved when things had slipped back into their wonted course. Her life was a fiasco indeed if she failed to please Rachel Simpson.

CHAPTER XXXI.

STRADIVARIUS.

The chapel doors were open, and a bright light streamed across the gravelled enclosure on to the dreary street beyond. People were flocking in, talking and laughing, in eager anticipation of pleasures to come; and a number of hungry-eyed children clung to the railing, and gazed at the promise of good things within.

And indeed the promise was a very palpable one. Mona had scarcely entered the outer door when she was presented with a large earthenware cup and saucer, a pewter spoon, and a well-filled baker's bag.

"What am I to do with these?" she asked, aghast.

"Take them in with you, of course," said Rachel. "You can look inside the bag, but you mustn't eat anything till the interval."

Mona thought she could so far control her curiosity as to await the appointed time, but her strength of mind was not subjected to this test. A considerable proportion of the assembled congregation were children, and most of them were engaged in laying out cakes, sweet biscuits, apples, pears, figs, almonds, and raisins, in a tempting row on the book-board, somewhat to the detriment of the subjacent hymn-books.

"They ordered three hundred bags at threepence each," said Rachel, in a loud whisper. "It's wonderful how much you get for the money; and they say Mr Philip makes a pretty profit out of it too. I suppose it's the number makes it pay. The cake's plain, to be sure; I always think it would be better if it were richer, and less of it. But there's the children to think of, of course."

At this moment a loud report echoed through the church. Mona started, and had vague thoughts of gunpowder plots, but the explosion was only the work of an adventurous boy, who had tied up his sweets in a handkerchief of doubtful antecedents, that he might have the satisfaction of blowing up and bursting his bag. This feat was pretty frequently repeated in the course of the evening, in spite of all the moral and physical influence brought to bear on the offenders by Mr Stuart and the parents respectively.

The chapel was intensely warm when the speakers took their places on the platform, and Mona fervently hoped that Mr Stuart had failed to find a stopgap, as the programme was already of portentous length. It seemed impossible that she could sit out the evening in such an atmosphere, and still more impossible that the bloodless, neurotic girl in front of her should do so.

The first speaker was introduced by the chairman.

"Now for the moral windbags!" thought Mona resignedly.

She felt herself decidedly snubbed, however, when the speeches were in full swing. The gift of speaking successfully at a *soirée* is soon recognised in the world where *soirées* prevail, and the man who possesses it acquires a celebrity often extending beyond his own county. One or two of the speakers were men possessing both wit and humour, of a good Scotch brand; and the others made up for their deficiencies in this respect by a clever and laborious patchwork of anecdotes and repartees, which, in the excitement of the moment, could scarcely be distinguished from the genuine mantle of happy inspiration.

In the midst of one of the speeches a disturbance arose. The girl in front of Mona had fainted. Several men carried her out, shyly and clumsily, in the midst of a great commotion; and, after a moment's hesitation, Mona followed them. She was glad she had done so, for fainting-fits were rare on that breezy coast, and no one else seemed to know what to do. Meanwhile the unfortunate girl was being held upright in the midst of a small crowd of spectators.

"Lay her down on the matting," said Mona quietly, "and stand back, please, all of you. No, she wants nothing under her head. One of you might fetch some water—and a little whisky, if it is at hand. It is nothing serious. Mrs Brander and I can do all that is required."

All the men started off for water at once, much to Mona's relief. She loosened the girl's dress, while the matron produced smelling-salts, and in a few minutes the patient opened her eyes, with a deep sigh.

"Surely Kirkstoun is not her home," said Mona, looking at the girl's face. "Sea-breezes have not had much to do with the making of her."

"Na," said the matron. "She's a puir weed. She's visiting her gran'faither across the street. I'll tak' her hame."

"No, no," said Mona. "Go back to the *soirée*, I'll look after her."

"Ye'll miss your tea! They're takin' roun' the teapits the noo."

"I have had tea, thank you," and, putting a strong arm round the girl's waist, Mona walked home with her, and saw her safely into bed.

She hurried back to the chapel, for she knew Rachel would be fretting about her; but the night breeze was cold and fresh, and she dreaded returning to that heated, impure air. When she entered the door, however, she scarcely noticed the atmosphere, for the laughing and fidgeting had given place to an intense stillness, broken only by one rich musical voice.

> "So my eye and hand,
> And inward sense that works along with both,
> Have hunger that can never feed on coin."

Mr Stuart's stopgap was filling his part of the programme.

Mona hesitated at the door, and then quietly resumed her place at the end of the pew beside Rachel. The reader paused for a moment till she was seated, a scarcely perceptible shade of expression passed over his face, as her silk gown rustled softly up the aisle, and then he went on.

It was a curious poem to read to such an audience, but even the boys and girls forgot their almonds and raisins as they listened to the beautiful voice. For Mona, the low ceiling, the moist walls, and the general air of smug squalor vanished like a dissolving view. In their place the infinite blue of an Italian sky rose above her head, the soft warm breeze of the south was on her cheek; and she stood in the narrow picturesque street listening to the "plain white-aproned man," with the light of the eternal in his eyes.

> "'Tis God gives skill,
> But not without men's hands: He could not make
> Antonio Stradivari's violins
> Without Antonio. Get thee to thy easel."

It was over. There was a long breath, and a general movement in the chapel. Dudley took an obscure seat at

the back of the platform, shaded his eyes with his hand, and looked at Mona.

Again and again in London he had told himself that it was all illusion, that he had exaggerated the nobility of her face, the sensitiveness of her mouth, the subtle air of distinction about her whole appearance; and now he knew that he had exaggerated nothing. His eye wandered round the congregation, and came back to her with a sensation of infinite rest. Then his pulse began to beat more quickly. He was excited, perhaps, by the way in which that uncultured audience had sat spellbound by his voice, for at that moment it seemed to him that he would give a great deal to call up the love-light in those eloquent eyes.

"She is a girl," he thought, with quick intuition. "She has never loved, and no doubt she believes she never will. I envy the man who forces her to own her mistake. She is no sweet white daisy to whom any man's touch is sunshine. There are depths of expression in that face that have never yet been stirred. Happy man who is the first—perhaps the only one—to see them! He will have a long account to settle with Fortune."

And then Dudley pulled himself up short. Thoughts like these would not lead to success in his examination. And even if they would, what right had he to think them? Till his Intermediate was over in July, he must speak to no woman of love; and not until his Final lay behind him had he any right to think of marriage. And any day while he was far away in London the man might come—the man with the golden key——

Dudley turned and bowed to the speaker in considerable confusion. Some graceful reference had evidently been made to his reading, for there was a momentary pause in the vague droning that had accompanied his day-dreams, and every one was looking at him with a cordial smile.

"Who would have thought of Dr Dudley being here?" said Rachel, as the cousins walked home. "It is a great pity his being so short-sighted; he looks so much nicer

without his spectacles. I wonder if he remembers what good friends we were that day at St Rules?—I declare I believe that's him behind us now."

She was right, and he was accompanied by no less a person than the Baptist minister.

"I would ask you to walk out and have a bachelor's supper with me, Stuart, by way of getting a little pure air into your lungs," Dudley had said, as he threw on his heavy Inverness cape; "but it is a far cry, and I suppose you have a guest at your house to-night."

The minister had accepted with alacrity. He was tired, to be sure, but he would gladly have walked ten miles for the sake of a conversation with one of his "intellectual peers."

"I have no guest," he had said eagerly; "it was my man who failed me. I would ask you to come home with me, but there are things we cannot talk of before my wife. 'Leave thou thy sister,'—you know."

A faint smile had flitted over Dudley's face at the thought of Mr Stuart's "purer air."

So they set out, and in due course they overtook Rachel and Mona.

Mr Stuart could scarcely believe his eyes when he saw Dr Dudley actually slackening his pace to walk with them. It was right and Christian to be courteous, no doubt, but this was so utterly uncalled for.

Dudley did not seem to think so, however. He exchanged a few pleasant words with Rachel, and then, regardless alike of her delight and of the minister's irritation, he very simply and naturally walked on with Mona in advance of the other two.

Many a time, when hundreds of miles had separated them, Mona and Dudley had in imagination talked to each other frankly and simply; but, now that they were together, they both became suddenly shy and timid. What were their mutual relations? Were they old friends, or mere acquaintances? Neither knew.

The silence became awkward.

"Your reading was a great treat," said Mona, somewhat formally at last.

Anybody could have told him that. He wanted something more from her.

"I am glad if it did not bore you," he said coldly.

She looked up. They were just leaving the last of the Kirkstoun street-lamps behind them, but in the uncertain light they exchanged a smile. That did more for them than many words.

"It is not poetry of course," he said. "It is only a magnificent instance of what my shaggy old Edinburgh professor would call 'metrical intellection.'"

"And yet, surely, in a broader sense, it is poetry. It seems to me that that magnificent 'genius of morality' produces art of a kind peculiarly its own. It is not cleverness; it is inspiration—though it is not 'poesie.' In any case, you made it poetry for me. I *saw* the sunny, glowing street, and the blue sky overhead."

"Did you?" he said eagerly. "Truly? I am so glad. I had such a vivid mental picture of it myself, that I thought the brain-waves must carry it to some one. It is very dark here. Won't you take my arm?"

"No, thank you; I am well used to this road in the dark. By the way, I must apologise for disturbing your reading. I would have remained at the door, but I was afraid some man would offer me his seat, and that we should between us kick the foot-board and knock down a few hymn-books before we settled the matter."

"I was so relieved when you came forward and took your own place," he said slowly, as though he were determined that she should not take the words for an idle compliment. "I had been watching that vacant corner beside Miss Simpson. How is Castle Maclean?"

"It is pretty well delivered over to the sea-gulls at present. I am afraid it must be admitted that Castle Maclean is more suited to a summer than to a winter

residence. I often run down there, but these east winds are not suggestive of lounging."

"Not much," he said. "When I picture you there, it is always summer."

"Oh," said Mona suddenly, "there is one thing that I must tell you. You remember a conversation we had about the Cooksons?"

"Yes."

"Matilda and I are great friends now, and I have had good reason to be ashamed of my original attitude towards her. I think it was you who put me right."

"Indeed it was not," he said warmly. "I, forsooth! You put yourself right—if you were ever wrong."

"I was wrong. And you—well, you took too high an estimate of me, and that is the surest way of putting people right. You have no idea how much good stuff there is in that child. She is becoming quite a German scholar; and she has read *Sesame and Lilies*, has been much struck by that quotation from Coventry Patmore, and at the present moment is deep in *Heroes*. What do you say to that?"

"Score!" he said quietly. "How did she come to know you?"

"Oh, by one of the strange little accidents of life. She has done me a lot of good, too. She is very warm-hearted and impressionable."

There was a lull in the conversation. Across the bare fields came the distant roar of the sea. They were still nearly half a mile from home, and a great longing came upon Mona to tell him about her medical studies. Why had she been such an idiot as to make that promise; and, having made it, why had she never asked her cousin to release her from it? She drew a long breath.

"My dear," said Rachel's voice behind them, "Mr Stuart wants to have a little conversation with you. Well, doctor, I hope Mistress Hamilton is not worse, that you are here just now?"

Mr Stuart's wrongs were avenged.

For one moment Dudley thought of protesting, but the exchange of partners was already effected, and he was forced to submit.

"Our conversation was left unfinished this morning, Miss Maclean," said the minister.

"Was it? I thought we had discussed the subject in all its bearings. You are to be congratulated on the substitute you found."

"Am I not?" he answered warmly. "It was all by accident, too, that I met the doctor, and he was very unwilling to come. He had just run down for one day to settle a little business matter for his aunt; but I put him near the end of the programme, so that he might not have to leave the house till near Mrs Hamilton's bedtime."

For one day! For one day!

The minister sighed. Miss Simpson had left him no choice about "speaking to" her cousin; but he did not feel equal to an encounter to-night; and certainly he could scarcely have found Mona in a less approachable mood.

"You are not a Baptist, Miss Maclean?"

"No."

"Have you studied the subject at all?"

"The Gospels are not altogether unfamiliar ground to me;" but her tone was much less aggressive than her words.

"And to what conclusion do they bring you?"

"I think there is a great deal to be said in favour of the Baptist view; but, Mr Stuart, it all seems to me a matter of so little importance. Surely it is the existence, not the profession, of faith that redeems the world; and the precise mode of profession is of less importance still."

"Do you realise what you are saying?" Mr Stuart began to forget his fatigue. "God has declared that one 'mode of profession,' as you call it, is in accordance with His will, but you pay no heed, because your finite reason tells you that it is of so little importance."

"It is God who is responsible for my finite reason, not I," said Mona; and then the thought of where this conversation must lead, and the uselessness of it, overwhelmed her.

Her voice softened. "Mr Stuart," she said, "it is very kind of you to care what I think and believe—to-night, too, of all times, when you must be so tired after that 'function.' I believe it is a help to some people to talk, but I don't think it is even right for me—at least at present. When I begin to formulate things, I seem to lose the substance in the shadow; I get interested in the argument for the argument's sake. Believe me, I am not living a thoughtless life."

Mr Stuart was impressed by her earnestness in spite of himself. "But, my dear young lady, is it wise, is it safe, to leave things so vague, to have nothing definite to lean upon?"

"I think so; if one tries to do right."

"It is all very well while you are young, and life seems long; but trouble will come, and sickness, and death——"

Rachel and Dudley had reached the gate of Carlton Lodge, and were waiting for the other two. But Mr Stuart did not think it necessary to break off, or even to lower his voice.

"——and when the hour of your need comes, and you can no longer grapple with great thoughts, will you not long for a definite word, a text——?"

Dudley's face was a picture. Mona underwent a quick revulsion of feeling. How dared any one speak to her publicly like that! She answered lightly, however, too lightly—

> "'Denn, was man schwarz auf weiss besitzt,
> Kann man getrost nach Hause tragen'"!

Of course she knew that Dr Dudley alone would understand, and of course Dudley keenly appreciated the apt quotation.

"Holloa, Stuart!" he said, "you seem to be figuring in a new and alarming *rôle*. I am half afraid to go in with you. I wish you could come and join in our discussion, Miss

Maclean. 'Nineteenth Century Heretics' is our topic. Stuart takes the liberal side, I the conservative."

"Do you think it expedient," said the minister reproachfully, as the two men crunched the gravel of the carriage-drive beneath their feet, "to talk in that flippant way to women on deep subjects?"

"Oh, Miss Maclean is all right! She could knock you and me into a cocked-hat any day."

And he believed what he said—at least so far as the minister was concerned.

"She really is very intelligent," admitted Mr Stuart. "I quite miss her face when she is not at church on Sunday morning; but you know she does put herself forward a little. What made her go out after that fainting girl, when so many older women were present? Oh, I forgot, you had not arrived——"

"It was well for the fainting girl that she did," interrupted Dudley calmly. "When I was going to the vestry some one rushed frantically against me, and told me a woman had fainted. I arrived on the scene a moment after Miss Maclean, but fortunately she did not see me. By Jingo, Stuart, that girl can rise to an occasion! If ever your chapel is crowded, and takes fire, you may pray that Miss Maclean may be one of the congregation."

It gave him a curious pleasure to talk like this, but he would not have trusted himself to say so much, had it not been for the friendly darkness, and the noise of the gravel beneath their feet.

Mr Stuart suspected nothing. Dr Dudley and Rachel Simpson's cousin! People would have been very slow to link their names.

"Yes, she is very intelligent," he repeated. "I must try to find time to have some more talks with her."

"I wish you joy of them!" thought Dudley. "I should like to know how you tackle a case like that, Stuart," he said. "Tell me what you said to her, and what she said to you."

CHAPTER XXXII.

CHUMS.

Action and reaction are equal and opposite.

Dudley was back in his den in London. For the first day after his return, he had thought of nothing but Mona; her face had come between him and everything he did. Now it was bending, grave and motherly, over the fainting girl, now it was sparkling with mischief at the quotation from *Faust*, now it vibrated to the words of *Stradivarius*, and now—oftenest of all—it looked up at him in the dim lamplight, with that enquiring, inexplicable smile, half friendly, half defiant.

And the evening and the morning were the first day.

But now the second day had come, and Dudley was thinking—of Rachel Simpson.

He pushed aside his books, and tramped up and down the room. How came she there, his exquisite fern, in that hideous dungeon? And was she indeed so fair? Removed from those surroundings, would she begin for the first time to show the taint she had acquired? In the drawing-room, at the dinner-table, in a *solitude à deux*, what if one should see in her a suggestion of—Rachel Simpson?

And then Mona's face came back once more, pure, high-souled, virgin; without desire or thought for love and marriage. There was not the faintest ruby streak on the bud, and yet, and yet—what if he were the man to call it forth? Why had she refused his arm? It would have been pleasant to feel the touch of that strong, self-reliant little hand. It would be pleasant to feel it now——

There was a knock at the door, and a fair-haired, merry-eyed young man came in.

"Holloa, Melville!" said Dudley. "Off duty?"

"Ay; Johnston and I have swopped nights this week."

"Anything special on at the hospital?"

"No, nothing since I saw you. That Viking is not going to pull through, after all."

"You don't mean it!"

"Fact. I believe that bed is unlucky. This is the third case that has died in it. All pneumonia, too."

"I believe pneumonia cases ought to be isolated."

"I know you have a strong theory to that effect. I did an external strabismus to-day."

"Successful?"

"I think so. I kept my hair on. By the way, you remember that duffer Lawson?"

"Yes."

"He has hooked an heiress—older than himself, but not so bad-looking. He will have a practice in no time now. I met him bowling along in his carriage, and there was I trudging through the mud! It's the irony of fate, upon my soul!"

"True," said Dudley; "but you know, when we have all the intellect, and all the heart, and all the culture, we don't need to grudge him his carriage."

"I'll shy something at you, Ralph! And now I want your news. How is the way?"

"Thorny."

"And the prospect of the anatomy medal?"

"Dim. But what are medals to an 'aged, aged man' like me?"

"You are hipped to-night. What's up?"

Dudley did not reply at once. He was intensely reserved, as a rule, about his private affairs, but a curious impulse was upon him now to contradict his own character.

"You and I have been chums for twenty years, more or less, Jack," he said irrelevantly.

"True, O king! Well?"

"I want to ask your advice on an abstract case."

"Do you? Fire away! I am a dab at medical etiquette." Dudley had been paying a few professional visits for a friend.

"It is not a question of medical etiquette," he said testily. "Suppose," he drew a long breath—"suppose you knew a young girl——"

"Ah! My dear fellow, I never do know a young girl! It is the greatest mistake in the world."

"Suppose," went on Dudley, unheeding, "that physically, mentally, and morally, she was about as near perfection as a human being can be."

"Oh, *of course!*"

"I don't ask your opinion as to the probability of it. I don't say I know such a person. Man alive! can't you suppose an abstract case?"

"It is a large order, but I am doing my level best."

"Suppose that, so far as she was concerned, it was simply all over with you."

"Oh, that is easy enough. Well?"

"Would you marry her, if——"

"Alack, it had to come! Yes. If——?"

"If she was a—a tremendous contrast to her people?"

"Oh, *that* is it, is it?" Melville sprang to his feet, and spoke very emphatically. "No, my dear fellow, upon my soul, I would not! They grow into their heredity with all the certainty of fate. I would rather marry a *gauche* and unattractive girl because her mother was charming."

This was rather beside the point, but it depressed Dudley, and he sighed.

"But suppose—one has either to rave or make use of conventional expressions—suppose she was infinitely bright, and attractive, and womanly?"

"Oh, they are all that, you know."

"If you knew her——"

"Oh, of course. That goes without saying. Now we come back to the point we started from. As I told you before, I never do know them, and it keeps me out of a world of mischief."

Melville seated himself by the fire, and buried his hands in his curly hair.

"Ralph, while we are at it," he said, "I want to give you a word of advice. *Verb. sap.*, you know. If any man knows you, I am that man. As you were remarking, you have lain on my dissecting-board for twenty years."

"I wish you had done me under water. You would have made a neater thing of it."

"So I would, old fellow, but you were too big. The difficulty was to get you into my mental laboratory at all."

Dudley bowed.

"Don't bow. It was well earned. You fished for it uncommon neatly. But you know, Ralph, I am serious now. Let me say it for once—you are awfully fastidious, awfully sensitive, awfully over-cultured. Few women could please you. It matters little whether you marry a good woman or a bad,—I don't know that there is much difference between them myself; the saints and the sinners get jumbled somehow,—but you must marry a woman of the world. Gretchen would be awfully irresistible, I know—for a month; she would not wear. Marry a woman full of surprises, a woman who does not take all her colour from you, a woman who can keep you dangling, as it were."

"It sounds restful."

Melville laughed. "Restful or not, that's the woman for you, Ralph. You are not equal to an hour at the Pavilion, I suppose? Well, ta-ta."

Dudley sat in silence till the echo of his friend's steps on the pavement had died away. Then he rose and tramped up and down the room again.

"After all, Miss Simpson is only her cousin," he said. "If I routed about I might find some rather shady cousins myself. But then I don't live with them. If her parents were a decided cut above that, how comes she there? And being there, how can she have escaped contamination? I wonder what Miss Simpson's dinner-table is like? Ugh! Is it as squalid as the shop? And why is the shop so squalid? Does Miss Simpson allow no interference in her

domain? And yet I cannot conceive of Miss Maclean being out of place at a duchess's table."

He dropped into a chair, clasped his hands behind his head, and spoke aloud almost indignantly in his perplexity.

"How can a provincial shop-girl be a woman of the world? And yet, upon my soul! Miss Maclean seems to me to come nearer Melville's description than any woman I ever knew. Alack-a-day! I must be besotted indeed. Oh, damn that examination!"

Ralph returned to his books, however, and tried hard to shut out all farther thoughts of Mona that night.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

CARBOLIC!

"Holloa, Jones! going home?"

"I am going to lunch; I may be back in the afternoon."

"Please yourself, my dear fellow, but if you don't finish that axilla to-day, I shall be under the painful necessity of reflecting the pectorals, and proceeding with the thorax, at 9 A.M. to-morrow."

"Oh, I say, Dudley, that is too bad."

"I fail to see it. You have had one day too long as it is."

"But you know I did cut my finger."

"H'm. I have not just the profoundest faith in that cut finger. You know it *did* happen on the day of the football-match."

The boy laughed. "And Collett will never manage that sole of the foot without you," he said.

"Collett must." Dudley smiled up at the eager face that was bending over his dissection. "I only undertook to find

the cutaneous branch of the internal plantar," and he lifted the nerve affectionately on the handle of his scalpel. "Come, Jones, fire away. *Ce n'est pas la mer à boire.* Half an hour will do it."

"Oh, I say! It would take me four hours. You know, Dudley, there is such a lot of reading on the axilla. I am all in a muddle as it is. I'll sit up half the night reading it, if you will give me another day."

"Very sorry, old man. *Ars longa.* I must get on with my thorax. It will do you far more good to read in the dissecting-room. Preconceived ideas are a mistake. Get a good lunch, and come back. That's your scalpel, I think, Collett."

"Oh, bother! I only wish I had ideas of any kind! I wish to goodness somebody would demonstrate the whole thing to me, and finish the dissection as he goes along!"

"I will do that with pleasure, if you like, to-morrow. The gain will be mine—and perhaps it will be the best thing you can do now. But don't play that little game too often, if you mean to be an anatomist."

"I don't," cried the boy vehemently. "I wish to heaven I need never see this filthy old hole again!"

Dudley glanced round the fine airy room, as he stood with his hands under the tap.

"I know that feeling well," he said.

"You, Dudley! Why, somebody said the other day that the very dust of the dissecting-room was dear to you."

"So it is, I think," said Ralph, smiling. "But it was very different in the days when I stroked the nettle in the gingerly fashion you are doing now."

"You mean that you think I should like it better if I really tucked into it," said the boy ruefully.

"I don't think at all; I know. 9 A.M. to-morrow sharp, then."

Dudley stepped out briskly into the raw damp air. The mud was thick under foot, and the whole aspect of the world was depressing to the hard-worked student. One by one

the familiar furrows took possession of his brow, and his step slackened gradually, till it kept pace with the dead march of his thoughts. He was within a stone's-throw of his rooms, when a dashing mail-phaeton came up behind him. A good horse was always a source of pleasure to him, and he noted, point by point, the beauties of the two fine bays, which, bespattered with foam, were chafing angrily at the delay caused by some block in the street. Suddenly Ralph bethought himself of Melville's story about the "irony of fate," and he glanced with amused curiosity at the occupant of the carriage.

There was no irony here. The reins lay firmly but easily in the hands of a man who was well in keeping with the horses,—fine-looking, of military bearing, with ruddy face, and curly white hair. He, too, seemed annoyed at the block, for there was a heavy frown on his brow.

At last the offending cart turned down a side-street, and the bays dashed on. Immediately in front of them was a swift heavy dray, and behind it, as is the fashion among *gamins*, sublimely regardless of all the dangers of his position, hung a very small boy. The dray stopped for a moment, then suddenly lumbered on, and before either Dudley or the driver of the phaeton had noticed the child, he had fallen from his precarious perch, and lay under the hoofs of the bays.

With one tremendous pull the phaeton was brought to a standstill, while Dudley and the groom rushed forward to extricate the child.

"I think he is more frightened than hurt," said Ralph, "but my rooms are close at hand. If you like, I will take him in and examine him carefully. I am a doctor."

"Upon my soul, I am very much obliged to you! I am leaving town for the Riviera to-night, and it would be confoundedly awkward to be detained by a business of this kind. Step up, will you? Charles will hand up the child after you are in."

The boy lay half stunned, drawing little sobbing breaths.

When they reached the house, Dudley handed the latch-key to his companion, and, raising the boy in his strong arms, he carried him up the steps.

"Bless me, you are as good as a woman!" said the man of the world, in amused admiration, as he opened the door. "It was uncommonly lucky for me that you happened to be passing."

Dudley showed his new acquaintance into his snuggery, while he examined the boy. The snuggery was a room worth seeing. There was nothing showy or striking about it, but every picture, every book, every bit of pottery, had been lovingly and carefully chosen, and the *tout ensemble* spoke well for the owner of the room.

"A man of culture clearly," said the visitor, after making a leisurely survey; "and what a life for him, by Gad!—examining dirty little *gamins!* He can't be poor. What the deuce does he do it for?"

"He is all right," said Dudley emphatically, re-entering the room. "He has been much interested in my manikin, and at the present moment is tucking vigorously into bread-and-marmalade. I have assured him that ninety-nine drivers out of a hundred would have gone right over him. You certainly are to be congratulated on the way you pulled those horses up."

"Do you think so? I am very glad to hear it. Gad! I thought myself it was all over with the little chap. The fact is—it is a fine state of affairs if I can't manage a horse at my time of life; but I confess my thoughts were pretty far afield at the moment. It is most annoying. I have taken my berth on the Club Train for this afternoon, and I find I shall have to go without seeing my niece. I wrote to make an appointment, but it seems she has left her former rooms. By the way, you are a doctor. Do you happen to know any of the lady medical students?"

Dudley shook his head. "I am sorry I have not that honour," he said.

His visitor laughed harshly.

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from Dudley's cultured face to his long nervous hands, "you ought to know—given a woman, pure, and good, and strong, could she go through it all unharmed?"

"Pure, and good, and strong," repeated Dudley reflectively. "Given a woman like that, you may safely send her through hell itself. I think the fundamental mistake of our civilisation has been educating women as if they were all run in one mould. She will get her eyes opened, of course, if she studies medicine, but some women never attain the possibilities of their nature in the shadow of convent walls. Frankly, I have no great fancy for artificially reared purity."

"Artificially reared!" exclaimed the other. "My dear sir, there are a few intermediate stages between the hothouse and the dunghill! If it were only art, or literature, or politics, or even science, but anatomy—the dissecting-room!"

"Well," said Dudley rather indignantly, his views developing as he spoke, "even anatomy, like most things, is as you make it. Many men take possession of a 'little city of sewers,' but I should think a pure and good woman might chance to find herself in the 'temple of the Holy Ghost.'"

His visitor was somewhat startled by this forcible language, and he did not answer for a moment. He seemed to be attentively studying the pattern of the carpet. Presently he looked full at Dudley, and spoke somewhat sharply.

"Knowing all you do, you think that possible?"

"Knowing all I do, I think that more than possible."

The man of the world sat for some time in silence, tapping his boot with a ruler he had taken from the writing-table.

"I'll tell you what I can do for you," said Dudley suddenly. "I can give you the address of the Women's Medical School. Your niece is probably there."

"Oh Lord, no! I am a brave man, but I am not equal to that. I would rather face a tiger in the jungle any day.

Well, sir, I am sure I am infinitely obliged to you. I wish I could ask you to dine at my club, but I hope I shall see you when I am next in London. That is my card. Where's the little chap? Look here, my man! There is a Christmas-box for you, but if you ever get under my horses' feet again, I will drive right on; do you hear?"

He shook hands cordially with Dudley, slipped a couple of guineas into his hand, and in another minute the impatient bays were dashing down the street.

"Sir Douglas Munro," said Dudley, examining the card. "A magnificent specimen of the fine old Anglo-Indian type. I should like to see this wonderful niece of his!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

PALM-TREES AND PINES.

A world of palm-trees and pines, of aloes and eucalyptus, of luxuriant hedges all nodding and laughing with gay red roses, of white villas gleaming out from a misty background of olives, of cloudless sky looking down on the deep blue sea—a vivid sunshiny world, and in the midst of it all, Miss Lucy, to all appearance as gay and as light-hearted as if she had never dissected the pterygo-maxillary region, nor pored over the pages of Quain.

The band was playing waltzes in the garden below, and Lucy, as she dressed, was dancing and swaying to and fro, like the roses in the wind.

"*Entrez!*" she cried, without moderating her steps, as she heard a knock at the door.

It was Evelyn, fair, tall, and somewhat severe.

"You are not very like a medical student," she said gravely.

"I should take that for an unmixed compliment, if I did not know what it meant."

"What does it mean?"

"That I am not in the least like Mona."

"Well, you are not, you know."

"True, *ma belle*. It was you who fitted on the lion's skin, not I. But did you come into my room just to tell me that?"

"I came to say that if you can be ready in ten minutes, Father will take us all to Monte Carlo."

"Ten minutes! Oh, Evelyn, and you have wasted one! What are you going to wear?"

"This, of course. What should I wear?"

Lucy selected a gown from her wardrobe. "But is not Sir Douglas still awfully tired with the journey?" she asked, looking over her shoulder to get a back view of her pretty skirt in the pier-glass.

"He has rested more or less for two days, and he is anxious to see the Monteiths before they go on to Florence."

She did not add, "I told him you were pining to see Monte Carlo before you go home."

"The Monteiths," repeated Lucy involuntarily. And as she heard the name on her own lips, the healthy flush on her cheek deepened almost imperceptibly.

Evelyn seated herself on a hat-box.

"I don't believe you will ever be a doctor," she remarked calmly.

"What do you bet?" Lucy did not look up from the arduous task of fastening her bodice.

"I don't bet; but if you ever are, I'll—*consult* you!"

And having solemnly discharged this Parthian dart, she left the room.

In truth, the two girls were excellent friends, although they were continually sparring. Evelyn considered Lucy an absolute fraud in the capacity of "learned women," but she did not on that account find the light-hearted medical student any the less desirable as a companion. As to com-

paring her with Mona, Evelyn would have laughed at the bare idea; and loyal little Lucy would have been the first to join in the laugh: she had never allowed any one even to suspect that she had passed an examination in which Mona had failed. Mona was the centre of the system in which she was a satellite; she was bitterly jealous of all the other satellites in their relation to the centre, but who would be jealous of the sun?

Lady Munro had taken a great fancy to her visitor. She would not have owned to the heresy for the world, but she certainly was much more at her ease in Lucy's society than she ever had been in Mona's, and how Sir Douglas could find his niece more *piquante* than Lucy Reynolds, she could not even imagine. She knew exactly where she had Lucy, but even when Mona agreed with her most warmly, she had an uncomfortable feeling that a glance into her niece's mind might prove a little startling. She met Lucy on common ground, but Mona seemed to be on a different plane, and Lady Munro found it extremely difficult to tell when that plane was above, and when below, her own.

She would have been not a little surprised, and her opinion of the relative attractions of the two friends might have been somewhat altered, had any one told her that Mona admired and idealised her much more even than Lucy did. If any one of us were unfortunate enough to receive the "giftie" of which the poet has sung, it is probable that the principal result of such insight would be a complete readjustment of our friendships.

But now Sir Douglas had appeared upon the scene, and of course Lucy was much more anxious to "succeed" with him than with either of the others. She had seen very little of him as yet, and she had done her best, but so far the result had been somewhat disappointing. It was almost a principle with Sir Douglas never to pay much attention to a pretty young girl. He had seen so many of them in his day, and they were all so much alike. Even this saucy little *Æsculapia militans* was no exception. As the scien-

tist traces an organism through "an alternation of generations," and learns by close observation that two or three names have been given to one and the same being, so Sir Douglas fancied he saw in Lucy Reynolds only an old and familiar type in a new stage of its life-history.

He had gone through much trouble and perplexity on the subject of Mona's life-work; and Dudley's somewhat fanciful words had for the first time given expression to a vague idea that had floated formless in his own mind ever since he first met his niece at Gloucester Place. It would be ridiculous to apply such an explanation to Lucy's choice, but Sir Douglas had no intention of opening up the problem afresh. He took for granted that Lucy had undertaken the work "for the fun of the thing," because it was novel, startling, *outré;* and he confided to his wife that "that old Reynolds must be a chuckle-headed noodle in his dotage to allow such a piece of nonsense."

In a very short time after Evelyn's summons to Lucy, the whole party were rattling down the hill to the station, in the crisp, cold, dewy morning air. Evelyn was calm and dignified as usual, but Lucy was wild with excitement. Everything was a luxury to her—to be with a man of the world like Sir Douglas, to travel in a luxurious first-class carriage, to see a little bit more of this wonderful world.

They left Nice behind them, and then the scenery became gradually grander and more severe, till the train had to tunnel its way through the mighty battlements of rock that towered above the sea, and afforded a scanty nourishment to the scattered pines, all tossed and bent and twisted by the wind in the enervating climate of the south. At last, jutting out above the water, at the foot of the rugged heights, as though it too, forsooth, had the rights of eternal nature, Monte Carlo came in view,—gay, vulgar, beautiful, tawdry, irresistible Monte Carlo!

"Is that really the Casino?" said Lucy, in an eager hushed voice.

Sir Douglas laughed. Lucy's enthusiasm pleased him in spite of himself.

"It is," he said; "but, if you have no objection, we'll have something to eat before we visit it."

To him the Casino was a commonplace toy of yesterday; to Evelyn it was a shocking and beautiful place, that one ought to see for once; to Lucy it was a temple of romance. No need to bid her speak softly as she entered the gorgeous, gloomy halls, with their silent eager groups.

"Shall we see Gwendolen Harleth?" she whispered to Evelyn.

On this occasion, however, Gwendolen Harleth was conspicuous by her absence. There were a number of women at the roulette-tables who looked like commonplace, hard-working governesses; there were be-rouged and be-jewelled ladies of the *demi-monde;* there were wicked, wrinkled old harpies who always seemed to win; and there were one or two ordinary blooming young girls; but there was no Gwendolen Harleth. For a moment Lucy was almost disappointed. It all looked so like a game with counters, and no one seemed to care so very much where the wheel stopped: surely the tragedy of this place had been a little overdrawn.

At that instant her eyes fell on an English boy, whose fresh honest face was thrown into deep anxious furrows, and who kept glancing furtively round, as if to make sure that no one noticed his misery. His eye met Lucy's, and with a great effort he tried to smooth his face into a look of easy assurance. He was not playing, but he went on half unconsciously, jotting down the winning numbers on a slip of paper.

"*Messieurs, faites vos jeux.*"

The boy opened a large lean pocket-book, and drew out his last five-franc piece.

"*Le jeu est fait.*"

With sudden resolution he laid it on the table, and pushed it into place.

"*Rien ne va plus.*"

"*Vingt-sept.*"

And the poor little five-franc piece was swept into the bank.

The boy smiled airily, and returned the empty book to his pocket.

Lucy looked at her companions, but none of them had noticed the little tragedy. Sir Douglas led the way to another table, and finally he handed a five-franc piece to each of the girls. To his mind it was a part of the programme that they should be able to say they had tried their luck.

Lucy hesitated, strongly tempted. Dim visions floated before her mind of making "pounds and pounds," and handing them over to that poor boy. Then she shook her head.

"My father would not like it," she whispered.

Sir Douglas shrugged his shoulders. Verily, there was no accounting for taste. How a man could allow his daughter to spend years in the dissecting-room, and in the surgical wards of a hospital,—subject her, in fact, to the necessity of spending her life in an atmosphere of carbolic,—and object to her laying a big silver counter on a green cloth, just for once, was more than he could divine.

Evelyn hesitated also. But it would be such fun to say she had done it. She took the coin and laid it on the table. "Where would you put it?" she whispered rather helplessly to Lucy.

Lucy knew nothing of the game, but she had been watching its progress attentively, and her eye had been trained to quick and close observation. Annoyed at Evelyn's slowness, and without stopping to think, she took the cue and pushed the coin into place. It was just in time. In another instant Evelyn's stake was doubled.

"There, that will do," said Sir Douglas, as Evelyn seemed inclined to repeat the performance. "I don't want to see your cheeks like those of that lady opposite."

A gentleman stood aside to let them leave the table, and as they passed he held out his hand to Lucy. She did not

take it at once, but looked up at Sir Douglas in pretty consternation.

"*There!*" she said. "I knew it! This is one of my father's churchwardens."

Sir Douglas was much amused. "Well," he said, "you have at least met on common ground!"

Lucy attempted a feeble explanation of the situation in which she had been caught, and then hastily followed the others to the inner temples sacred to *Rouge et Noir*. Here, at least, there was tragedy enough even at the first glance. Lucy almost forgot the poor lad at the roulette-table, as she watched the piles of gold being raked hither and thither with such terrific speed. One consumptive-looking man, whose face scarcely promised a year of life, was staking wildly, and losing, losing, losing. At last the piles in front of him were all gone. After a moment's hesitation they were followed by note after note from his pocket-book. Then these too came to an end, but still the relentless wheel went on with that swiftness that is like nothing else on earth. The man made no movement to leave the table. With yellow-white shaking hands he continued to note the results, and while all the rest were staking and winning and losing, he went on aimlessly, feverishly pricking some meaningless design on the ruled sheet before him. And all the time two young girls were gaining, gaining, gaining, and smiling to the men behind them as they raked in the piles of gold.

"Let us go," said Lucy quickly. "I cannot bear this."

"I do think we have had enough of it," Lady Munro agreed. "I am thirsty, Douglas; let us have some coffee."

They strolled out into the bright sunshine.

"Well," said Sir Douglas, "a little disappointing, *n'est ce pas?*"

"Oh no," said Lucy; "not at all. It is far more real than I thought. The only disappointing thing is that——"

"What?"

She lifted her eyes with an expression of profound gravity.

"All the women trim their own hats."

"Why, Lucy," put in Evelyn, "I saw some very nice hats."

"I did not say none of them trimmed their hats *well*," said Lucy severely. "I only said they all trimmed their own."

"We are rather too early in the day for *toilettes*," said Sir Douglas. "I confess one does not see many attractive women here; but there was a highly respectable British matron just opposite us at that last table."

"Yes," said Lucy indignantly. "She was the worst of all; sailing about in her comfortable British plumage, with that air of self-satisfied horror at the depth of Continental wickedness, and of fond pride in the bouncing flapper at her heels. She made me feel that it was worse to look on than to play."

"Don't distress yourself," said Sir Douglas quietly; "you did play, you know. Ask the churchwarden."

"I owe you five francs," said Evelyn, "or ten. Which is it?"

"*Don't!*" said Lucy. "It is no laughing matter for me, I can assure you. Many is the trick I have played on that man. Heigh-ho! He has his revenge."

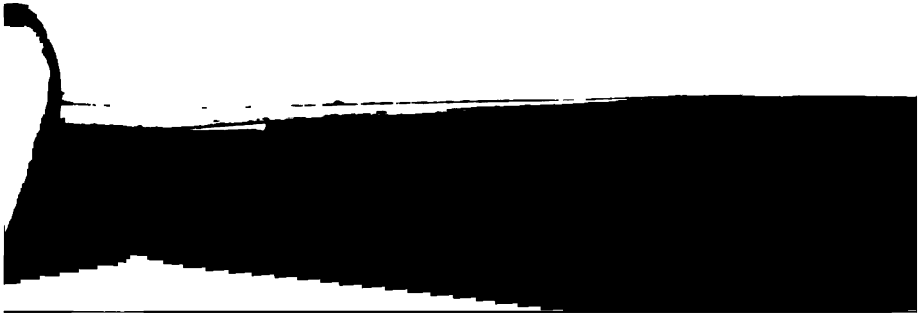
"Don't be down-hearted. You had at least the satisfaction of winning."

But Lucy was in no humour for being teased, and, to change the subject, she began to tell the story of the different tragedies she had witnessed.

"It is all nonsense, you know," said Sir Douglas good-humouredly. "That is the sort of stuff they put in the good books. People who are really being bitten don't attract attention to themselves by overdone by-play."

Lucy did not reply, but she retained her own opinion. Overdone by-play, indeed! As if she had eyes for nothing more subtle than overdone by-play!

"In the meantime we will have our coffee," said Sir Douglas, "and then I will leave you at the concert, while I look up Monteith. I will come and fetch you at the end of the first part. Here, Maud, this table is disengaged."



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"I can believe that. It seems Mona told her aunt that she was leaving her old rooms, and that it would be well to address letters for the present to the care of her man of business. Is that what you do?"

"I have not written for a long time. I shall send my next to her man of business."

"And won't I just give Mona a vivid account of how I came to do it!" she added mentally.

"Have you seen this lady—Mona's cousin? I don't know anything about her."

"No, I have not. I believe she is very quiet, and elderly, and respectable,—and dull; the sort of person in whose house one can get through a lot of work."

"Humph," growled Sir Douglas. "A nice life for a girl like Mona!"

"I am sure I wish she were here!"

Sir Douglas looked at her. "Some of us," he said quietly, "wish that every day of our lives. I called the other day to take her for a drive in the Park, but found she had left her old rooms." And then he told the story of his little misadventure of a few days before.

"Oh," said Lucy, "what a terrible pity! Mona *loves* driving in the Park. Do go for her again some day when she is working in London. You have no idea what a treat a drive in the Park is to people who have been poring over their bones, and their books, and their test-tubes."

"Well, what in the name of all that is incomprehensible does she do it for? She might drive in the Park every day if she chose."

"But then," said Lucy, "she would not be Mona."

The muscles of his face relaxed, and then contracted again.

"Even admitting," he said, "that all is well just now, how will it be ten years hence?"

"Ten years hence," said Evelyn, "Mona will have married a clever young doctor. Lucy says the students have several times married the lecturers."

Sir Douglas frowned. "I should just like to see," he flashed out angrily, "the young doctor who would presume to come and ask me for Mona! I hate the whole trade. Why, that young fellow I told you about, who came to my rescue, was infinitely superior to most of them—cultured, and travelled, and that sort of thing—but, bless my soul! he was not a man of the world. I would sooner see Mona in a convent than give her to a whipper-snapper like that!"

"Evelyn is wrong," said Lucy. "Mona will not marry. She never thinks of that sort of thing. Ten years hence she will be a little bit matronly, by reason of all the girls and women she will have mothered. Her face will be rather worn perhaps, but in my eyes at least she will be beautiful."

"And in yours, Douglas," said Lady Munro, "she will still be the bright young girl that she is to-day."

She laughed softly as she spoke, but the laugh was a rather half-hearted one. She had learnt the difference between the fruit that is in a man's hand, and the fruit that is just out of reach.

CHAPTER XXXV.

WEEPING AND LAUGHTER.

Sir Douglas had gone to see his friend, but it was still too early for the concert, so Lady Munro and the girls strolled round to the terrace overlooking the sea.

"How lovely, how lovely!" said Lucy. "I wonder if there is any view in all the world like this?"

"We must find those two statues by Sara Bernhardt and Gustave Doré," said Evelyn, looking up from her Baedeker. "One of them represents——"

"Oh, bother the statues!" cried Lucy. "I want to feel

things to-day, not to look at them." Her voice changed suddenly. "Lady Munro," she said very softly, "that is my boy leaning on the stone balustrade. Now, did I exaggerate? Look at him!"

Lady Munro walked on for a moment or two, and then glanced at the lad incidentally; but the glance extended itself with impunity into a very deliberate study. The boy's face was flushed, and he was muttering to himself incoherently as he gazed in front of him with unseeing eyes.

"He looks as if he was going mad," remarked Evelyn frankly.

"He looks a great deal more like an acute maniac than most acute maniacs do," said Lucy, with a proud recollection of a few visits to an asylum. "Oh, Lady Munro, do, do go and speak to him! You would do it so beautifully."

Lady Munro hesitated. She never went out of her way to do good, but this boy seemed to have come into her way; and her action was none the less beautiful, because it was dictated, not by principle at all, but by sheer motherly impulse.

She left the girls some distance off, and rustled softly up to where he stood.

"*Pardon, monsieur,*" she said lightly, "can you tell me where the statue by Gustave Doré is?"

He started and looked up. One did not often see a gracious woman like this at Monte Carlo.

"I beg your pardon," he said, making a desperate effort to collect his thoughts. Distraught as was his air, his accent and manner were cultured and refined. Lady Munro's interest in him increased.

"Do you know where there is a statue by Gustave Doré?"

He shook his head. "I am sorry I don't," he said, and he turned away his face.

But Lady Munro did not mean the conversation to end thus. "This is a charming view, is it not?" she said.

"Ye-e-s," he said; "oh, very charming."

"I think I saw you at one of the tables in the Casino. I hope you were successful?"

He turned towards her like a stag at bay. There was anger and resentment in his face, but far more deeply written than either of these was despair. It was such a boyish face, too, so open and honest. "Don't you see I can't talk about nothings?" it seemed to say. "You are very kind and very beautiful; I am at your mercy; but why do you torture me?"

"You are in trouble," Lady Munro said, in her soft, irresistible voice. "Perhaps it is not so bad after all. Tell me about it."

A woman more accustomed to missions of mercy would have calculated better the effect of her words. In another moment the tears were raining down the lad's cheeks, and his voice was choked with sobs. Fortunately, the great terrace was almost entirely deserted. Lucy and Evelyn sat at some distance, apparently deep in the study of Baedeker, and in a far-off corner an old gentleman was reading his newspaper.

The story came rather incoherently at last, but the thread was simple enough.

The boy had an only sister, a very delicate girl, who had been ordered to spend the winter at San Remo. He had taken her there, had seen her safely installed, and—had met an acquaintance who had persuaded him to spend a night at Monte Carlo on the way home. From that point on, of course, the story needed no telling. But the practical upshot of it was that the boy had in his purse, at that moment, precisely sixty-five centimes in money, and a twenty-five-centime stamp; he had nothing wherewith to pay the journey home, and he was some pounds in debt to his friend.

Truly, all things are relative in life. While some men were forfeiting their thousands at the tables with comparative equanimity, this lad was wellnigh losing his reason for the sake of some fifteen pounds.

"What friends had he at home?" was of course Lady Munro's first question. "Had he a father—a mother?"

His mother was dead, and his father—his father was very stern, and not at all rich. It had not been an easy matter for him to send his daughter to the Riviera.

"That is what makes it so dreadful," said the lad. "I wish to heaven I had taken a return ticket! but I wanted to go home by steamer from Marseilles. The fatal moment was when I encroached on my journey-money. After I had done that, of course I had to go on to replace it; but the luck was dead against me. Oh, if I could only recall that first five francs! If I could have foreseen this—but I meant——"

"You meant to win, of course," said Lady Munro kindly.

The boy laughed shamefacedly, in the midst of his misery.

"Well, I think my punishment equals my sin," he said. "I would gladly live on bread and water for months, if I could undo two days of my life. I keep thinking round and round in a circle, till I am nearly mad. I *cannot* write to my father, and yet what else can I do?"

Lady Munro was silent for a few minutes when the lad had finished speaking. She was wondering what Sir Douglas would say. When a married woman is called upon to help her fellows, she has much to think of besides her own generous impulses; and in Lady Munro's case it was well perhaps that this was so. She would empty her purse for the needy as readily as she would empty it for some jewel that took her fancy, sublimely regardless in the one case as in the other of the wants of the morrow. Ah, well! it is a good thing for mankind that a perfect woman is not always essential to the *rôle* of ministering angel!

'I will try to help you," she said at last, "though I cannot absolutely promise. In the meantime here is a napoleon. That will take you to Cannes, and pay for a night's lodging. Call on me to-morrow between ten and eleven." She handed him her card. "I think," she added

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"Why, Mr Monteith, my husband has just gone to your hotel."

"Yes; he told me you were here, so I left him and my father together."

He shook hands with the two girls, and seated himself beside Lucy.

"You here?" she said with an air of calm indifference, which was very unlike her usual impulsive manner.

"Nay, it is I who should say that. You here? And you leave me to find it out by chance from Sir Douglas?"

"It did not occur to me that you would be interested;" and she fanned herself very gracefully, but very unnecessarily, with her programme.

"Little coquette!" thought Lady Munro. But Lucy looked so charming at the moment, that not even a woman could blame her.

"How is Cannes looking?"

"Oh, lovely—lovelier than ever. Some awfully nice people have come."

"So you don't miss any of those who have gone?"

"Not in the least."

"And you would not care to see any old friend back again for a day or two?"

There was a moment's pause.

"I don't think there would be room; the hotel seems full——"

With a sudden burst of harmony the music began, and there was no more conversation till the next pause.

"Have you ever walked up to the chapel on the hill again?"

"Oh, lots of times!"

"You have been energetic. Have you chanced to see the Maritime Alps in the strange mystical light we saw that day?"

"Yes. They always look like that."

"Curious! Then I suppose the walk has no longer any associations——"

"Oh, but it has—bitter associations! We left the path to get some asparagus, and my gown caught in a bramble-bush, and a dog barked——"

The first soft notes of the violins checked the tragic sequel of her tale, and the music swelled into a pathetic wailing waltz, which brought the first part of the programme to an end.

Sir Douglas came during the interval to take them away, and Mr Monteith walked down with them to the station.

"I am sorry there is no room for me at the hotel," he said, as he stood with Lucy on the platform.

"Pray, don't take my word for it. I don't 'run the shanty.' Perhaps you could get a bed."

"What is the use, if people would be sorry to see an old acquaintance?"

"How can you say such things?" said Lucy, looking up at him cordially. "I am sure there are some old ladies in the hotel who would be delighted to see you."

"But no young ones?"

"I can't answer for them."

"You can for yourself."

"Oh yes."

"And you don't care one way or the other?"

"No;" she shook her head slowly and regretfully.

"Not at all?"

"Not at all."

"Not the least bit in the world?"

Lucy lifted her eyes again demurely. "When one comes to deal with such very small quantities, Mr Monteith," she said, "it is difficult to speak with scientific accuracy. If you really care to know——"

"Yes?"

"Where are the Munros?"

"In the next carriage. Do finish your sentence."

"I don't remember what I was going to say," said Lucy calmly. "A sure proof, my old nurse used to tell me, that it was better unsaid."

She sprang lightly up the high step of the carriage, and then turned to say good-bye. The colour in her cheeks was very bright.

Ten minutes later she seemed to have forgotten everything except the wonderful afterglow, which reddened the rocks and trees, and converted the whole surface of the sea into one blazing ruby shield.

Sir Douglas was nodding over his newspaper. Lucy laid her hand on Lady Munro's soft fur.

"You have been very good to me," she said. "I don't know how to thank you. I really think you have opened the gates of Paradise to me."

The words suggested a meaning that Lady Munro did not altogether like, but she answered lightly,—

"It has been a great pleasure to all of us to have you, dear; but you know we don't mean to let you go on Thursday."

Lucy smiled. "I must," she said sadly. "A week hence it will all seem like a beautiful dream—a dream that will last me all my life."

"Well, I am glad to think the roses in your cheeks are no dream, and I hope they will last you all your life, too."

And then the careless words re-echoed through her mind with a deeper significance, and she wished Sir Douglas would wake up and talk, even if it were only to grumble.

That night there were two private conversations.

Evelyn had gone into Lucy's room to brush her hair in company.

"What a touching sight!" said Lucy, laughing suddenly, as, by the dancing firelight, she caught sight of the two fair young figures in the mirror—their loosened hair falling all about their shoulders. "Come on with your confidences! Now is the time. At least so they say in books."

"Unfortunately I have not got any confidences."

"Nor have I—thank heaven!" She bent low over the glowing wood-fire. "What slavery love must be!"

Evelyn watched her with interest, but Lucy's next words were somewhat disappointing.

"Evelyn," she said, "how is it Mona has contrived to charm your father so? I need not tell you what I think about her, but, broadly speaking, she is not a man's woman, and I should not have fancied she was the sort of girl to fetch Sir Douglas at all."

"I don't think it strange," said Evelyn languidly. "I have often thought about it. You see, she is very like what my mother must have been at her age, though not nearly so charming to mere acquaintances; and then just where the dear old Mater stops short, the real Mona begins. It must be such a surprise to Father!"

"That is ingenious, certainly. How Mr Monteith admires your mother!"

"Does he?"

"I wonder what he would think of Mona!"

"I can't guess."

"Have you known him long?"

"Father and Mother have known his father long."

"Do you think he is honest?"

"Which?"

"The son, of course."

"He never stole anything from me."

"Don't be a goose! Do you think he means what he says?"

Evelyn paused before replying.

"You don't?" said Lucy quickly.

"I was trying to remember anything he did say," Evelyn answered very deliberately. "The only remark I can remember addressed to myself was, 'Brute of a day, isn't it?' I think he meant that. He certainly looked as if he did."

"Douglas," said Lady Munro, "would Colonel Monteith allow his son to marry Lucy Reynolds?"

"Nonsense! what ideas you do take into your head!"

"Because, if he would not, things have gone quite far

enough. George said something to me about [illegible] to Cannes for a day or two. Of course that child is attraction. If you think it will end in nothing, he must not come."

"So that is what her vocation amounts to!"

"My dear Douglas! what does she know of life? She is a child——"

"Precisely, and her father is another. God bless my soul! Monteith's son must marry an heiress."

Lady Munro did not pursue the subject; she had something else to talk of. She rose presently, and walked across the room.

"Douglas," she said, stopping idly before the glass, "I wish you would give me your recipe for looking youthful. You will soon look younger than your wife."

"Nonsense," he said gruffly, but he smiled. His wife did not often make pretty speeches now-a-days. As it happened she was looking particularly young that night, too. Perhaps that fact had struck her, and had suggested the remark.

For half an hour they chatted together, as they might have done in the old, old days, and then——

And then Lady Munro broached the subject of the boy at Monte Carlo.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

NORTHERN MISTS.

It seems gratuitously cruel to take my readers back to bleak old Borrowness in this dreary month of December; away from the roses and the sunshine, and the wonderful matchless blue, to the mud, and the mist, and the barren fields, and the cold, grey sea.

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ings of his family, he would have been strongly tempted to offer his heart and hand to Miss Simpson's bright and capable assistant. It would be an advantage in many ways to have a wife who understood the business; and, poor thing, she would not readily find a husband in Borrowness. She was thrown away at present—there was no doubt of that. Why, with her quick head at figures, and her fine lady manners, she could get a situation anywhere.

Mona, fortunately, was all unaware of the tempting fruit that dangled just above her head. She had, it is true, some difficulty in keeping the traveller to the point, when she had dealings with him; but her limited intercourse with the other sex had not taught her to regard this as peculiarly surprising.

What rejoiced her heart, far more even than the success of the shop, was the number of women and girls who had got into the way of consulting her about all sorts of things. "I exist here now," she wrote to Doris, "in the dual capacity of assistant to Miss Simpson, and of general referee on the choice of new goods and the modification of old ones. 'Goods' is a vague term, and is to be interpreted very liberally. It includes not only dresses and bonnets and furniture, but also husbands."

Rachel did not at all approve of this large and unremunerative *clientèle*. If there had been any question of "honesty and religion like," it would have been different; but she considered that the "hussies wasted a deal of Mona's time, when she might have been better employed."

To Matilda Cookson, of course, she objected less; but she never could sufficiently express her wonder at Mona's inconsistency in this respect.

"As soon as the Cooksons begin to notice you, you just bow down like all the rest, for all your fine talk," she said one day, in a moment of irritation.

Mona strove to find a gentle reply in vain, so, contrary to all her principles, she was constrained to receive the remark in irritating silence.

Matilda Cookson had remained very true to her allegiance, and would at this time have proved an interesting study to any psychologist whose path she had chanced to cross. Almost at a glance he could have divided all the opinions she uttered into two classes—those that were her own, and those that were Mona's. The former were expressed with timid deference; the latter were flung in the face of her acquaintances, with a dogmatic air of finality that was none the less irritating because the opinions themselves were occasionally novel and striking. Matilda glowed with pride when she repeated a bold and original remark; she stammered and blushed when one of her own poor fledgelings stole into the light. It was on the former that a rapidly developing reputation for "cleverness" was insecurely based; it was the latter that delighted Mona's heart, and made her intercourse with the girl a source of never-ceasing interest. It is so easy to heap fuel on another mind; but to apply the first spark, to watch it flicker, and glow, and catch hold—that is one of the things that is worth living for.

To one of Mona's *protégées* Rachel never even referred, and that was the girl who had fainted at the *soirée*. Mona had taken an interest in her patient, had prescribed a course of arsenic and green vegetables; and the improvement in the girl's appearance had seemed almost miraculous.

"She usedna tae be able tae gang up the stair wi'oot sittin' doon tae get her breath," said her grandmother to Miss Simpson one day; "an' noo, my word! she's awa' like a cat up a tree."

Rachel carefully refrained from repeating this remark to Mona. She was afraid that so surprising a result might encourage her cousin to persevere in a work which Rachel fondly hoped had been relinquished for ever. The good soul had been much depressed on chancing to see the prescription which Mona had written for the girl. Why, it was a real prescription—like one of Dr Burns'! When a woman had got the length of writing *that*, what was the use of telling her she would never make a doctor? What more, when

you came to think of it, did doctors do? There was nothing for it but to encourage Mr Brown, and Rachel forthwith determined to invite him and his sisters to tea.

The study of the *Musci*, *Algæ*, and *Fungi* had not proved a striking success hitherto. There had been one delightful ramble among the rocks and pools, but since then the pursuit had somewhat flagged. Several excursions had been arranged, but all had fallen through. On one occasion Miss Brown had been confined to the house; on another she had been obliged to visit an aunt who was ill; and on a third the weather had been unpropitious.

"My dear," said Rachel one day, after the formation of the bold resolution above recorded, "if you are going in to Kirkstoun, you might stop at Donald's on the Shore, and order some cookies and shortbread. To-morrow's the day the cart comes round, and I'm expecting Mr Brown and his sisters to tea."

Mona nearly dropped the box of tape she was holding.

"Dear cousin," she said, "the sisters have never called on you, have they?"

"No," replied Rachel frankly, "but one must make a beginning. They offered us tea the day we were there."

"I promised Mrs Ewing that I would play the organ for the choir practice to-morrow evening."

"Well, I'm sure I never heard the like! She just takes her use of you."

"You must not forget that she allows me to practise on the organ whenever I like. It is an infinite treat to me."

"And what's the use of it, I wonder? You can't take an organ about with you when you go out to tea."

"That's perfectly true," said Mona, laughing; "it is a selfish pleasure, no doubt."

"It all comes of your going to the English chapel in the evening. If you'd taken my advice, you'd never have darkened its doors. They say so much about Mr Ewing being a gentleman, but I do think it was a queer-like thing their asking you to lunch, and never saying a word about me.

Mr Stuart doesn't set himself up for anything great, but he did ask you to tea along with me."

"The Ewings have not been introduced to you, dear."

"And whose doing is that, I'd like to know? We've met them often enough in the town."

Mona sighed. She considered that lunch at the Ewings' the great mistake of her life at Borrowness. She had resolved so heroically that Rachel's friends were to be her friends; but the invitation had been given suddenly, and she had accepted it. She had not stopped to think of infant baptism, or the relations of Church and State; or the propriety of a clergyman eking out his scanty stipend by raising prize poultry, or of allowing himself to be "taken up" by the people at the Towers; she had had a momentary mental vision of silky damask and of sparkling crystal, of intelligent conversation and of cultured voices, and the temptation had proved irresistible. The meek man lives in history by his hasty word, the truthful man's lie echoes on throughout the ages; the sin that is in opposition to our character, and to the resolutions of a lifetime, stands out before all the world with hideous distinctness. So in the very nature of things, if Mona had gone to Borrowness, as she might have done, armed with introductions to all the county families in the neighbourhood, Rachel would have felt herself less injured than by that single lunch at the Ewings'.

"Well, I will order the things at Donald's," said Mona, after an awkward silence.

"Yes; tell him I'll take the shortbread in any case, but I'll only take the cookies if my visitors come."

"Oh, then they have not accepted yet?"

"No."

"Then I need not have distressed myself," thought Mona, "for they certainly won't come." But she was annoyed all the same that Rachel should have subjected herself to the unnecessary snub of a refusal.

The refusal arrived that evening. It was worded with bare civility. They "regretted that they were unable," but

they did not think it necessary to explain why they were unable.

Rachel was very cross about the slight to herself, but she was not at all disheartened about her plan. One trump-card was thrown away, but she still held the king and the ace; the king was Mona's "tocher," and the ace was Mr Brown himself. The original damp box of plants had been followed by a number of others, and these had latterly been hailed by Rachel with much keener delight than they had afforded to Mona. Mr Brown was all right; there could be no shadow of doubt about that; and Rachel would not allow herself to fancy for a moment that Mona might be so blind to a sense of her own interests as to side with the Misses Brown.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE ALGÆ AND FUNGI.

The bazaar as an institution is played out. There can certainly be no two opinions about that. It has lived through a youth of humble usefulness, a middle life of gorgeous magnificence, and it is now far gone in an old age of decrepitude and shams. It has attained the elaboration and complexity which are incompatible with farther existence, and it must die. The cup of its abuses and iniquities is full. It has had its day; let it follow many things better than itself—great kingdoms, mighty systems—into the region of the things that have been and are not.

Yet even where the bazaar is already dead, we all seem to combine, sorely against our will, to keep the old mummy on its feet. Nor is the reason for our inconsistency far to seek. The bazaar *knows its world;* there is scarcely a human weakness—a weakness either for good or for evil—to which it

does not appeal; so it dies hard, and, in spite of ourselves, we cherish it to the last.

How we hate it! How the very appearance of its name in print fills our minds with reminiscences of nerve-strain, and boredom, and shameless persecution!

This being so, it is a matter of profound regret to me that a bazaar should appear at all in the pages of my story; but it is bound up inextricably with the course of events, so I must beg my readers to bear up as best they may.

"My dear," said Rachel, coming into the shop one day, eager and breathless, "I have got a piece of news for you to-day. The Miss Bonthrons want you to help them with their stall at the bazaar! It seems they have been quite taken with your manner in the shop, and they think you'll be far more use than one of those dressed-up fusionless things that only want to amuse themselves, and don't know what's left if you take three-and-sixpence from the pound. Of course they are very glad, too, that you should have the ploy. I told them I was sure you would be only too delighted. They were asking if there was no word of your being baptised and joining the church yet."

Mona bent low over her account-book, and it was a full minute before she replied. Her first impulse was to refuse the engagement altogether; her second was to accept with an indignant protest; her third and last was to accept without a word. If she had been doomed to spend a lifetime with Rachel, things would have been different; as it was, there were not three more months of the appointed time to run. For those months she must do her very utmost to avoid all cause of offence.

"I think a bazaar is the very last thing I am fitted for," she said quietly; "but, if you have settled it with the Bonthrons, I suppose there is nothing more to be said."

"Oh, you'll manage fine, I'm sure. There's no doubt you've a gift for that kind of thing. I can tell you there's many a one would be glad to stand in your shoes. You'll

see you'll get all your meals in the refreshment-room for nothing, and a ticket for the ball as well."

"I don't mean to go to the ball."

"Hoots, lassie, you'll never stay away when the ticket costs you nothing! I am thinking I might go myself, perhaps, to take care of you, like. It'll be a grand sight, they say, and it's not often I get the chance of wearing my green silk."

Again the infinite pathos of this woman, with all her vulgar, disappointed little ambitions, took Mona's heart by storm, as it had done on the night of her arrival at Borrowness; and a gentle answer came unbidden to her lips.

That afternoon, however, she considered herself fully entitled to set off and drink tea with Auntie Bell, and Rachel raised no objection when she suggested the idea.

"I would be glad if you would do a little business for me, as you pass through Kilwinnie," she said.

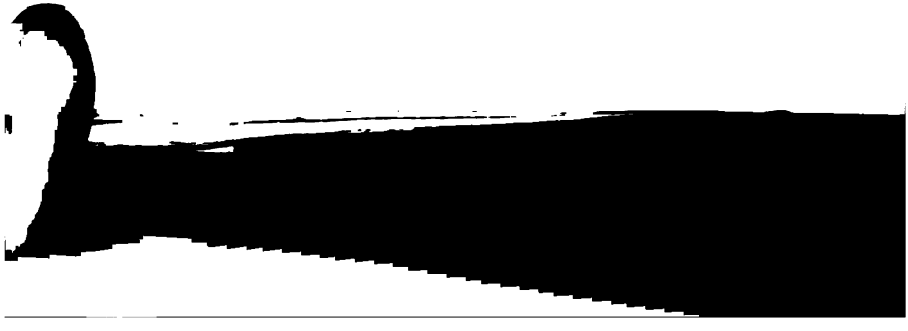
"I will, with pleasure."

"Just go into Mr Brown's," she said, "and ask him if he still has green ribbon like what he sold me for my bonnet last year. The strings are quite worn out. I think a yard and a half should do. I'll give you a pattern."

Mona fervently wished that the bit of business could have been transacted in any other shop, but it would not do to draw back from her promise now.

As she passed along the high street of Kilwinnie, she saw Miss Brown's face at the window above the shop, and she bowed as she crossed the street. Mr Brown was engaged with another customer, so Mona went up to the young man at the opposite counter, thankful to escape so easily. But it was no use. In the most barefaced way Mr Brown effected an exchange of customers, and came up to her, his solemn face all radiant with sudden pleasure. His eyes, like those of a faithful dog, more than atoned at times for his inability to speak.

"How is Miss Simpson?" he asked. This was his one idea of making a beginning.



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just as if they were men, and of course they take advantage of it, and get him talked about and laughed at."

"We tell him it really is too silly," said the third, "that, after all his experience, he should not know how to take care of himself."

Mona turned very pale, but she answered thoughtfully.

"When you asked me whether I considered Mr Brown an attractive man, I was inclined at first to say no; but what you say of him crystallises my ideas somewhat. I think his great attraction lies in the fact that he can meet women on common ground, without regard to sex. He realises, perhaps, that a woman may care for knowledge, and even for friendship, as well as for a husband. I should not try to change him, if I were you. His views may be peculiar here, but they are not altogether uncommon among cultured people."

She said the last words gently, with a pleasant smile, and then proceeded to put on her furs with an air of quiet dignity that would not have discredited Lady Munro herself, and that seemed to throw the Browns to an infinite distance.

It was some moments before any of them found voice.

"Must you go?" said the eldest at last, somewhat feebly. "Won't you take another cup of tea?"

"Thank you very much, but I am on my way to drink tea with Mrs Easson."

"Queer homely body, isn't she?" said the second sister, recovering herself. "She is your cousin, is she not?"

"I am proud to say she is."

"Oh, we've never arranged about the walk," said the youngest. "Any day next week that will suit you, will suit me."

"Oh, thank you; I am afraid this wonderful bazaar is going to absorb all our energies for some time to come. I fear the walk will have to be postponed indefinitely."

She shook hands graciously with her hostesses, and went slowly down by the stair that opened on the street.

"If I were five years younger," she said to her herself, "I should be tempted to encourage Mr Brown, just the least little bit in the world, and then——"

But not even when Mona was a girl could she have been tempted, for more than a moment, to avenge a petty wrong at the expense of those great, sad eyes.

Mr Brown had been looking out, and he came forward to meet her, nervous, eager.

"Have you arranged a day?" he asked.

"No; I fear I am going to be very busy for the next few weeks. It is very kind of you to suggest another walk. Good-bye."

She was unconscious that her whole manner and bearing had changed in the last quarter of an hour, but he felt it keenly, and guessed something of what had happened.

"Miss Maclean," he said hoarsely, grasping the hand she tried to withdraw, "what do we want with one of them in our walks? Come with me. Come up-stairs with me now, and we'll tell them——"

"I have stayed too long already," said Mona hastily; "good-bye." And without trusting herself to look at him again, she hurried away.

Her cheeks were very bright, and her eyes suffused with tears, as she continued her walk.

"How disgraceful!" she kept repeating; "how disgraceful! I must have been horribly to blame, or it never would have come to this."

But, as usual, before long her sense of the comic came to her rescue.

"Verily, my dear," she said, with a heavy sigh, "the study of the *Algæ* and *Fungi* is a large one, and leads us further than we anticipated."

Auntie Bell would not have been the shrewd woman she was, if she had not seen at a glance that something was wrong with her darling; but she showed her sympathy by

hastily "masking the tea," and cutting great slices from a home-made cake.

"Eh, but ye're a sicht for sair een!" she said, as she bustled in and out of the sitting-room. "I declare ye're bonnier than iver i' that fur thing. Weel, hoo's a' wi' ye?"

"Oh, I am blooming, as you see. Rachel is well, too."

"An' what w'y suld she no' be weel? She's no' i' the w'y o' daein' onything that's like to mak' her ill, I fancy, eh? Hae ye been efter the butterflies again wi' Maister Broon?"

The unexpected question brought the tell-tale colour to Mona's cheek.

"No," she said, "I am not going any more. It is not the weather for that sort of thing."

"Na," said Auntie Bell tersely; "nor he isna the mon for that sort o' thing. He's a guid mon, nae doot, an' a cliver, they say, for a' he's sae quite an' sae canny, an' sae ta'en up wi's beasts and things; but he's no' the mon for the like o' you. Ye wadna tak' him, Mona?"

"Dear Auntie Bell," said Mona abashed, "such a thing never even occurred to me——"

She did not add "until," but her honest face said it for her.

"He's no' been askin' ye?"

"No, no," said Mona warmly, "and he never will. Can a man and woman not go 'after the butterflies,' as you call it, without thinking of love and marriage?"

Auntie Bell's face was worth looking at.

"I nae ken," she said grimly; "I hae ma doots."

"Well, I assure you Mr Brown has not even mentioned such a thing to me."

Auntie Bell eyed her keenly through the gold spectacles, but Mona did not flinch.

"Then his sisters have," thought the old woman shrewdly. "I'll gie them a piece o' ma mind the neist time I'm doun the toun."

Mona's visits were necessarily very short on these winter afternoons, and as soon as tea was over she rose to go.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE BAZAAR.

It was the first day of the bazaar.

The weather was mild and bright, and the whole town wore an aspect of excitement. The interior of the hall was not perhaps a vision of artistic harmony; the carping critic might have seen in it a striking resemblance to the brilliant, old-fashioned patchwork quilt which some good woman had sent as her contribution, and which was now being subjected to a fire of small wit and adverse criticism, in the process of being raffled; but, to the inhabitants of the place, such a sight was worth crossing the county to behold, and indeed, at the worst, it was a bright and festive scene with its brave bunting and festoons of evergreens.

"Let Kirkstoun flourish!" was inscribed in letters of holly along the front of the gallery, in which a very fair brass band, accustomed apparently to performing in the open air, was pouring forth jaunty and dashing national music, which fell with much acceptance on well-balanced nerves.

The bazaar had formally been declared open by the great local patron, Sir Roderick Allison of Balnamora, and already the crowd was so great that movement was becoming difficult. Whatever Mona's feelings had been before the "function" came on, she was throwing herself into it now with heart and soul. All the day before she had been hard at work, draping, arranging, vainly attempting to classify; and the Bonthrons had many times found occasion to congratulate themselves on their choice of an assistant. The good ladies had very shyly offered to provide her with a dress for the occasion,—"something a little brighter, you know, than that you have on; not but what that's very nice and useful."

"Thank you very much," Mona had replied frankly. "I

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was honestly and truly sorry for her cousin's disappointment; she would gladly have borne the cold and confinement vicariously; but as that was impossible—well, it was pleasant for a day or two to be responsible only for her bright young self.

In a surprisingly short time the ante-prandial rush was over, and there was a comparative lull, during which stall-holders could compare triumphant notes, or even steal away to the refreshment-room. But now there was a sudden stir and bustle at the door.

"Well, I declare," exclaimed Miss Bonthron eagerly, "if this is not the party from the Towers!"

The two great local magnates of the neighbourhood were Sir Roderick Allison of Balnamora and Lord Kirkhope of the Towers. Sir Roderick, in his capacity of member for the eastern part of the county, took an interest in all that went on in the place; and although his presence at public gatherings was always considered a great honour, it was treated very much as a matter of course. The Kirkhopes, on the other hand, lived a frivolous, fashionable, irresponsible life; acknowledged no duties to their social inferiors, and were content to show their public spirit by permitting an occasional flower-show in their grounds; so, if on any occasion they did go out of their way to grace a local festivity, their presence was considered an infinitely greater triumph than was that of good bluff Sir Roderick. The parable of the prodigal son is of very wide application; and, where humanity only is concerned, its interpretation is sometimes a very sinister one.

Lady Kirkhope had filled her house with a large party of people for the Christmas holidays; and some sudden freak had induced her to bring a number of them in to the Kirkstoun Bazaar, just as a few months earlier she had taken her guests to the fair at St Rules, to see the fat woman and the girl with two heads. "Anything for a lark!" she used to say, and it might have been well if all the amusements with which she sought to while away her sojourn in the

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Doris is bad enough, but picture the Sahib in the shop!" She broke into a little laugh that was half a sob, and her eyes looked suspiciously bright.

"Mona," said Doris, coming up to her suddenly, "somebody is looking very charming to-day, do you know?"

"Yes," said Mona boldly, flashing back the compliment in an admiring glance; "I have been thinking so all morning, whenever intervening crowds allowed me to catch a glimpse of her."

"I have been longing so to say to all the room, 'Do you see that bright young thing? She is a medical student!'"

"Pray don't!" said Mona, horrified. "My cousin would never forgive you—nor, indeed, for the matter of that, should I. How are you getting on?"

"My dear," was the reply, "I have sold more rubbish this morning than I ever even saw before. After all, the secret of success at bazaars lies solely in the fact that there is *no* accounting for taste!"

At this moment a customer claimed Mona's attention, and, when she looked up again, Doris was in earnest conversation with an elderly gentleman. Mona overheard something about "women's power."

"Women," was the reply, delivered with a courteous bow, "have no power, they have only influence."

Doris flushed, then said serenely, "We won't dispute it. Influence is the soul, of which power is the outward form."

How sweet she looked as she stood there, her flower-like face uplifted, her dimpled chin in air, shy yet defiant! Mona thought she had never seen her friend look so charming, so utterly unlike everybody else. A moment later she perceived that she was not alone in her admiration. Unconscious that he was observed, a man stood a few yards off, listening to the conversation with a comical expression of amused, admiring interest; and that man was the Sahib.

Take your eyes off him, Mona, Mona, if you do not wish to be recognised! Too late! A wave of sunlight rushed across his face, kindling his homely features into a glow that

gladdened Mona's heart, and swept away all her hesitation. Verily she could trust this man, whom all women looked upon as a brother.

He resolutely dismissed the sunshine from his face, however, as he came up and shook hands. He could not deny that he was glad to see her, but nothing could alter the fact that she had treated him very badly.

"I called on you in London," he said in an injured tone, after their first greetings had been exchanged, "but it was a case of 'Gone; no address.'"

"Oh, I am sorry," said Mona. "It never occurred to me that you would call."

He looked at her sharply. Her regret was so manifest that he could not doubt her sincerity; and yet it was difficult sometimes to believe that she was not playing fast and loose. It was not as if she were an ordinary girl, ready to flirt with any man she met. Was it likely, after all they had said to each other in Norway, that he would let her slip out of his life without a protest? Was it possible that the idea of his calling upon her in London had never crossed her mind?

Mona was very far from guessing his thoughts. Strong in the conviction that she was not a "man's woman," she expected little from men, and counted little on what they appeared to give. She had a feeling of warm personal friendship for the Sahib, but it had never occurred to her to wonder what his feeling might be for her. Had they met after a separation of ten years, she would have welcomed with pleasure the cordial grasp of his hand; but that in the meantime he should go out of his way to see her, simply, as she said, never crossed her mind.

"Who would have thought of meeting you at a bazaar?" he said.

"It is I who should have said that. But, in truth, I am not here by any wish of my own. The arrangement was made for me. I should have looked forward to it with more pleasure if I had known I was to meet you."

His face brightened. "It is my turn now to protest that it is I who should have said that! My hostess brought a party of us. I am helping to spend Christmas in the old style at the Towers. Where are you staying, or have you just come over for the function?"

Mona's heart sank. "No; I am visiting a cousin in the neighbourhood."

"Then I hope I may give myself the pleasure of calling. Have you had lunch?"

"Not yet."

"That is right. I am sure you can be spared for the next quarter of an hour."

Mona introduced him to Miss Bonthron as a "family friend," and then took his arm. Now that they had met, no ridiculous notions of propriety should prevent their seeing something of each other.

"Do you know Lady Kirkhope?" he asked, as he piloted the way through the hall.

"No. I had better tell you at once that I am not in the least likely to know her; I——"

"Lady Kirkhope," said the Sahib suddenly, stopping in front of a vivacious dame, "I am sure you will be glad to make the acquaintance of Miss Maclean. She is the daughter of Gordon Maclean, of whom we were talking last evening."

"Then I am proud to shake hands with her," said the lady graciously. "There are very few men, Miss Maclean, whom I admire as I did your father."

A few friendly words followed, and then the Sahib and Mona continued their way.

"Oh, Mr Dickinson," said Mona, when they had reached the large refreshment-room, and were seated in a deserted corner, "what *have* you done?"

"Well, what have I done?" said the Sahib, in good-humoured mystification. "I ought to have asked your permission before introducing you in a place like this; but Lady Kirkhope is not at all particular in that sort of way, and we

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Munros have, and she needs me a great deal more. If I must stand or fall by my relatives, I choose to fall with Rachel Simpson rather than to stand with Lady Munro."

She rose to go, but he caught her hand.

"You said once that you had no wish to measure your strength against mine," he said, in a low voice. "I don't mean to let you go, so perhaps you had better sit down. It would be a pity to have a scene."

"Let my hand go in any case."

"Honest Injun?"

She yielded unwillingly with a laugh.

"Honest Injun," she said. "As we are here, I will stay for ten minutes," and she laid her watch on the table.

"That is right. I never knew any difficulty that was made easier by refusing to eat one's lunch."

"I don't admit that I am in any difficulty, and your way, too, is clear." She made a movement of her head in the direction of the door. "I am only sorry that you did not give me a chance to tell you all this before you introduced me to Lady Kirkhope. If I had known you were coming, I should have given you a hint to avoid me."

"Miss Maclean," he said, "will you allow me to say that you are a little bit morbid?"

She met his eyes with a frank full glance from her own.

"That is true," she said, with sudden conviction.

"And for a woman like you to see that you are morbid is to cease to be morbid."

"I am sure I don't want to be; but indeed it is so difficult to see what is simple and right. I have often smiled to think how I told you in summer, that the 'great, puzzling subject of compromise' had never come into my life."

"You said on the same occasion, if I remember rightly, that my life was infinitely franker and more straightforward than yours. I presume you don't say so still?"

"I do, with all my heart."

"H'm. Do you think it likely that I would go routing

up poor relations for the pleasure of devoting myself exclusively to their society?"

Mona's face flushed. "Mr Dickinson," she said, "I ought to tell you that I arranged to come to my cousin before I met the Munros. I don't say that I should not have done it in any case, but I made the arrangement at a time when, with many friends, I was practically alone in the world. And also,"—she thought of Colonel Lawrence's story,—"even apart from the Munros, if I had known all that I know now, about circumstances in the past, I am not sure that I should have come at all. That is all my heroics are worth."

"You are a magnificently honest woman."

"I am not quite sure that I am not the greatest humbug that ever lived. Two minutes more. Do you bear in mind that Lady Kirkhope said she would call on me?"

"I will see to that. Am I forgiven for introducing you to her?"

Mona smiled. "I shall take my revenge by introducing you to a much greater woman, my friend Doris Colquhoun."

"When am I to meet you again? May I call?"

"No."

"How do you get home to-night?"

"Miss Bonthron sends me in a cab."

"Shall you be at the ball?"

"No."

"You can easily get a good chaperon?"

"Oh yes."

"Will you go to the ball if I ask it as a personal favour to me?"

Mona reflected. "I don't see why I should not," she said simply.

"Thank you. And in the meantime, Miss Maclean, don't be in too great a hurry to stand or fall with anybody. You have not only yourself to think of, you know; we are all members one of another. And now behold your prey! Take me to your stall, and I will buy whatever you like."

The Sahib was not the only victim who yielded himself up unreservedly to Mona's tender mercies that day. Mr Brown came to the bazaar in the afternoon with a five-pound note in his pocket, and something more that four pound ten was spent at Miss Bonthron's stall.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE BALL.

A spacious hall with a well-waxed floor; a profusion of coloured lights and hothouse plants; a small string-band capable of posing any healthy, human thing under twenty-three with the reiterated query, "Where are the joys like dancing?"—all these things may be had on occasion, even in an old-world fishing town on the bleak east coast.

For youth is youth, thank heaven! over all the great wide world; and the sturdy, sonsy northern girl, in her spreading gauzy folds of white or blue, is as desirable in the eyes of the shy young clerk, in unaccustomed swallow-tails, as is the languid, dark-eyed daughter of the South to her picturesque impassioned lover. Nay, the awkward sheepish youth himself, he too is young, and, for some blue-eyed girl, his voice may have the irresistible cadence, his touch the magnetic thrill, that Romeo's had for Juliet.

So do not, I pray you, despise my provincial ball, because the dancing falls short alike in the grace of constant habit and in the charm of absolute *naïveté*. The room is all aglow with youth and life and excitement. One must be a cynic indeed not to take pleasure in that. There is something beautiful too, surely, even in the proud self-consciousness with which the "Provost's lady" steps out to head the first quadrille with good Sir Roderick, and in the shy delight

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that almost within a mile of the shop she should be received so naturally as a lady and a woman of the world; but, in point of fact, the Cooksons and Mrs Ewing were the only people who knew that she was Miss Simpson's assistant. Her regular *clientèle* was of too humble a class socially to be represented at the ball; her acquaintances in the neighbourhood were limited almost entirely to Rachel's friends and the members of the Baptist Chapel,—two sections of the community which were not at all likely to give support to such a festivity; and even people who had seen her repeatedly in her everyday surroundings, failed to recognise her in this handsome woman who had come to the ball with a very select party from St Rules.

Matilda glowed with triumph as she watched her friend move in a sphere altogether above her own; she longed to proclaim to every one how she had known all the time that Miss Maclean was a princess in disguise. How aghast Clarinda would be at her own stupidity, and with what shame she would recall her pointless sarcasms—Clarinda, who that very evening had said, she at least gave the shop-girl the credit of believing that the lace was imitation and the pearls false.

The night was wearing on, and Mona was sitting out a galop with Captain Steele, a handsome middle-aged man, whom the Sahib had introduced to her. They were conversing in a gay, frivolous strain, and Mona was reflecting how much easier it is to be entertaining in the evening if one has not been studying hard all day.

"Are you expecting any one?" asked the Captain suddenly.

"No; why do you ask?"

"You look up so eagerly whenever a new arrival is ushered in."

"Do I? It must be automatic. I scarcely know any one here."

But she coloured slightly as she spoke. His question made her conscious for the first time of a wish away down

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"Do I like myself, in other words? Not much."

"Don't be philosophical. When all is said, there is nothing like gossip. I *don't* like this part of the world; in fact, I don't know myself in it; it is a fast, frivolous, imbecile world!"

"Socially speaking, I presume, not geographically. At least, those are not strictly the adjectives I should apply to my surroundings. How come you to be in such a world?"

"Oh, I met Kirkhope a few years ago. He was indulging in a fashionable run across India, and he ran up against me. I was able to put him up to a thing or two, and last month when I met him in Edinburgh, he invited me down. In a weak moment I accepted his invitation, and now you see Fortune has been kinder to me than I deserve."

"I saw you in Edinburgh as I went through one day," said Mona, and she told him she had been disappointed not to be able to speak to him at the station.

"How very disgusting!" he said. "Yes, Edinburgh is my home—my father's, at least."

"And had you never met Doris before I introduced you to her?"

The Sahib did not answer for a moment.

"I had not been introduced. I had seen her. Hers is not a face that one forgets."

"And yet it only gives a hint of all that lies behind it. You might travel from Dan to Beersheba without finding such a gloriously unselfish woman, and such a perfect child of Nature."

"She is delightfully natural and unaffected. I think that is her great charm. What sort of man is Colquhoun? Of course every one knows him by name."

"Yes; he is very near the top of the tree in his profession. He is a scientist, too, but in that capacity he is a trifle —pathetic. Shall you call when you go back?"

"I have obtained permission to do so."

"You would do me a personal favour if you would enter into his scientific fads a little. Dear lovable old man! You

will have to laugh in your sleeve pretty audibly before he suspects that you are doing it."

'I don't think I shall feel at all inclined to. Is Miss Colquhoun a scientist too?"

"She is something better. She loves a dog because it is a dog, a worm because it is a worm. Science must stand cap in hand before such genuine inborn love of Nature as hers."

Again there was a pause before the Sahib answered. Then he roused himself suddenly.

"It seems to me, Miss Maclean, that you are shirking your part of the bargain. I have confided to you how it is I come to be here. It is your innings now."

Mona sighed.

"When I last saw you, you were a burning and shining medical light. Wherefore the bushel?"

"That is right. Strike hard at the root of my *amour propre*. It is good for me, though I wince. I am here, Sahib, mainly because I failed twice in my Intermediate Medicine examination."

Another of the Sahib's characteristic pauses.

"How on earth did you contrive to do it?" he asked at last. "When one sees the duffers of men that pass——"

The colour on Mona's cheek deepened. "I don't think a very large proportion of duffers pass the London University medical examinations," she said. "Of course one makes excuses for one's self. One began hospital work too soon; one's knowledge was on a plane altogether above the level of the examination papers, &c. It is only in moments of rare and exceptional honesty that one says, as I say to you now, 'I failed because I was a duffer, and did not know my work.'"

"Nay, you don't catch me with chaff. That is not the truth, and you don't think it is. I don't call that honesty!"

But although the Sahib spoke harshly, his heart was beating very warmly towards her just then. He had always considered Mona a clever and charming girl—a little too independent, perhaps, but her habitual independence made it the

more delightful to see her submitting like a child to his questions, holding herself bound apparently for the moment to answer honestly without fencing, however much the effort might cost her.

"It is the truth, and nothing but the truth," she said. "I venture sometimes to think it is not the whole truth."

"Shall you go in again?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"July."

"Do you think you will pass?"

"No."

"Then why do you do it?"

"I have promised."

Another long pause, and then it came unpremeditatedly with a rush.

"Look here, Miss Maclean,—chuck the whole thing, and come back to India with me!"

It was so absolutely unexpected, that for a moment Mona thought it was a joke. "That would be a delightfully simple way of cutting the knot of the difficulty," she said gaily, but before her sentence was finished she saw what he meant. She tried not to see it, not to show that she saw it, but the blood rushed over her face and betrayed her.

"Do come," he said. "Will you? I never cared for any woman as I care for you."

"Oh, Sahib," said Mona, "we cared for each other, but not in that way. You have taught me all I have missed in not having a brother."

She was not sorry for him; she was intensely annoyed at his stupidity. Not for a moment did it occur to her that he might really love her. He liked her, of course, admired her, sympathised with her, at the present moment pitied her; but did he really suppose that a woman might not gladly accept his friendship, admiration, sympathy, even his pity, without wishing to have it all translated into the vulgar tangible coin of an offer of marriage? Was marriage

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could rake up a disreputable forty-second cousin from some ash-heap or other;" and the existence of such a person, together with Mona's breakdown in her medical career, gave him a pleasant, though unacknowledged, sense of being the knight in the fairy tale who is to deliver the captive princess from all her woes. Moreover, Mona's peculiar circumstances had brought about an intimacy between them that might otherwise have been impossible. He had been admitted into one of the less frequented chambers of her nature, and he said to himself that it was a goodly chamber. It was pleasant to see the colour rise into her cheeks, to hear her breath come quick while she talked to him; and to-night—to-night she looked very beautiful, and no shade of doubt was left on his mind that he loved her.

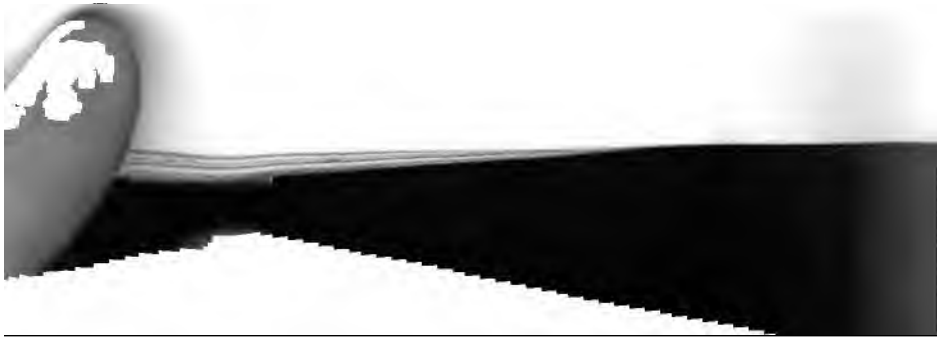
"I suppose you are the best judge of your feelings towards me," he said coldly; "but you will allow me to answer for mine."

The Sahib was a good man, and a simple-hearted, but he knew his own value, and it would have been strange if Mona's reply had not surprised him. In fact he could only account for it on one supposition, and that supposition made him very angry and indignant. His next words were natural, if unpardonable. Perhaps Mona's frankness was spoiling him.

"Tell me," he said sharply, "in the old Norway days, when we saw so much of each other, was there some one else then?"

Mona drew herself up. "I do call that an insult," she said quietly. "Do you suppose that every unmarried woman is standing in the market-place waiting for a husband? Is it impossible that a woman may prefer to remain unmarried for the sake of all the work in the world that only an unmarried woman can do?"

The Sahib's face brightened visibly for a moment. Perhaps it was true, after all, that this clever woman was more of a child in some respects than half the flimsy damsels in the ball-room.



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ing of you constantly, and when you are in Edinburgh I will come. Shall we go back to the ball-room?" He rose and offered her his arm.

"Mr Dickinson, I absolutely refuse to leave the question open. What is the use?"

"You will not do even that for me?"

"It would be returning evil for good."

"No matter. The results be on my own head!"

They were back in the noise and glare of the ball-room, and further conversation was impossible.

"Who would have thought of meeting two charming *émancipées* down here?" said Captain Steele, as the men drove back to the Towers.

"If all *émancipées* are like Miss Colquhoun," said a young man with red hair and a retreating chin, "I will get a book and go round canvassing for women's rights to-morrow!"

CHAPTER XL.

A LOCUM TENENS.

The excitement was over, and every one was suffering from a profound reaction. Rachel's cold was no better, and her temper was decidedly worse; for although the sermons still lay on her table, both they and the illness that had brought them into requisition had lost the charm of novelty. However—like the ravages of drink in relation to the efforts of temperance reformers—it was of course impossible to say how much worse she might have been without them.

Mona had by no means escaped the general depression consequent on the bazaar and the ball, and her cousin's querulousness was a heavy strain upon her endurance. Fortunately, it had the effect of putting her on her mettle. "I

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—leaving you to take all sorts of maggots into your head! But I've no doubt you think a sight more of her than you do of me, for all the time you've been with me."

This was the first time the Munros had been mentioned between the cousins, and Mona was not anxious to pursue the subject. "Your mother's sister married on a Sir." Oh, the sordidness of it!

Mona had refused to see the Sahib again during his stay at the Towers, and although she could not for a moment regret her refusal, she was conscious of a distinct sense of emptiness in her life. There was no doubt that for the moment she had lost her friend; and perhaps things might never again be as they had been before his clumsy and lamentable mistake. But although he was lost to her directly, she was only now beginning to possess him through Doris.

"He will see her constantly for the next two months," she thought, "and he cannot but love her. He loves her now, if he only knew it. It is absurd to suppose that he ever looked at me with that light in his eyes. He analyses me, and admires me deliberately, but Doris bowls him over. Whether she will care for him, is another question; but I am sure he at least possesses the prime merit in her eyes of being a Sir Galahad; and by the doctrine of averages, a magnificent son of Anak like that cannot be refused by two sensible women within the space of two months. He will consider himself bound to me of course, but he will fall in love with her all the faster for that; and at the appointed time he will duly present himself in much fear and trembling lest I should take him at his word. How amusing it will be!" And a cold little ray of sunshine stole across the chill grey mists of her life.

That day Rachel's appetite failed for the first time. Her face was more flushed than usual, and her moist, flabby hands became dry and hot. In some uneasiness Mona produced her clinical thermometer, and found that her cousin's temperature had run up to 102°.

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perspective, and she felt herself a sentient human being—dowered with the glorious privilege of living.

Rachel was no better, and as soon as Mona had made her patient and the room as neat and fresh as circumstances would allow, she set out to do the marketing. "Send Sally," Rachel said; but customers never came before ten, and Mona considered it the very acme of squalor to leave that part of the housekeeping to chance, in the shape of a thriftless, fusionless maid-of-all-work. She walked quickly through the sharp frosty air, and came in with a sprinkle of snow on her dark fluffy fur, and a face like a half-blown rose.

"The doctor has just gone up-stairs," whispered Sally, and Mona hastened up to find, not Dr Burns, but Dr Dudley. She was too much taken by surprise to conceal the pleasure she felt, and, much as Dudley had counted on this meeting, his brain well-nigh reeled under the exquisite unconscious flattery of her smile. It was a minute before he could control himself sufficiently to speak.

"I am afraid Dr Burns is ill," said Mona, as she took his hand.

"Yes, poor fellow! He is very much below par altogether, and he has taken a serious chill, which has settled on his lungs. I fear it will be some time before he is about again. A substitute will be here in a week, I hope; and in the meantime, *nolens volens*, I am thrust into the service. Thank you, Miss Simpson, that will do, I think." He took the thermometer to the light, and then gave Mona a few directions. "You have not got one of these things, I suppose?" he said.

"I never even had one in my hand," put in Rachel hastily.

"You know you can easily get one," added Mona severely.

"Oh, it's of no consequence. I think there is no doubt that this is only a feverish cold. I wish I had no more serious case. Go on with the mixture, but I should like Miss Simpson to take some quinine as well. I have no doubt she will be about again in a few days."

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had tried to ask Rachel's permission to tell him all; a dozen times the question, "Why him rather than any one else?" had sealed her lips. What if she were to make a clean breast of it now, and risk her cousin's anger afterwards? She could never hope for such another opportunity.

She was determined to use it, to tell him she knew the chances of those examinations only too well; but to her surprise she found the confession far more difficult than the one she had made to the Sahib. At the very thought of it, her heart beat hard and her breath came fast.

"This is too absurd!" she thought, in fierce indignation at her own weakness. "What do I care what he thinks? But if I cannot speak without panting as if I were trying to turn a mill, I must hold my peace. It is of little consequence, after all, whether he knows or not."

"Do you know," said Dudley deliberately, "I thought for a moment that I had come into the wrong house this morning? I never should have recognised your—quarters."

"Did you notice the difference? You must have a quick eye and a good memory."

Notice the difference! He had noticed few things in the last six months that had given him half the pleasure of that sweeping reformation. Dudley was no giant among men; but, if he cared for name and outward appearance, at least he cared more for reality; and, I think, the sight of that fresh, business-like, creditable shop was a greater comfort to his mind than it would have been to see his Cinderella at the ball. He had ceased to regret that Mona was a shopkeeper, but he was not too much in love to be glad that she was a good shopkeeper.

"I knew your influence was bound to tell in the long-run," he said. "I suppose Miss Simpson did not greatly encourage you to interfere?"

"No, but she has been very good. I don't believe I should have left an assistant as free a hand as she left me. I hope you admire my window. I call it a work of art."

"I call it something a great deal better than that," he

said rather huskily, as he held out his hand. "Good morning."

"Bless her!" he said to himself as he jumped into his gig. "She never apologises for the shop—never speaks as if it were something beneath her. My God, what a snob I am!"

As soon as he was gone, Mona raised the hand he had shaken, and looked at it deliberately. Then she took a few turns up and down the shop. "I never mean to marry," she said very slowly to herself, "and I don't suppose I shall ever know what it is to be in love; but it would be a fine test of a man's sincerity to see whether he would be willing to take me simply and solely as I am now—as Rachel Simpson's assistant."

The next day was Sunday, and Rachel was so much better that she insisted on Mona's going to church.

"Folk will be thinking it is something catching," she said, "and by the time I'm down-stairs again, there'll be nobody in the shop to talk to."

It was a bright, crisp morning, but Mona found the service rather a barren one.

"I suppose the doctor has been here," she said with marked indifference, when she re-entered Rachel's room.

"Yes; and very pleased he was to find me so well. He says I'm to get up to tea to-day, and go out for ten minutes to-morrow, if all's well. He is very busy, and he's not to come back unless we send for him. He's not one of them that tries how many visits they can put in."

"No," said Mona drearily, and then she roused herself with an effort. "I am so glad you are better, dear," she said. "Mr Stuart is coming to see you to-morrow afternoon."

CHAPTER XLI.

A SINGED BUTTERFLY.

When New Year's Day came round, the little household had fallen back into its ordinary routine. Mona had decorated the parlour with evergreens before Rachel left her sick-room; had superintended divers important proceedings in the kitchen; and had done her best to feel, and to make others feel, the festive influence of the season. The attempt had not been a very successful one, however; Rachel was at no time susceptible to the poetry of domestic life; and when dim visions rose in Mona's mind of giving a treat to her *protégées*, or to the Sunday-school children, she forced herself to remember that she was only a humble shopkeeper, bound to keep within the limits of her *rôle*. For one night she had played a more important part, but that was over now. She was back in her humble sphere, and, for very art's sake, she must keep her true proportion till the end. Fortunately, she was asked to assist in the management of one or two "treats," and, by means of these and a few anonymous contributions to local charities, she—to use an expression of her own—"saved her soul alive." She looked for no selfish enjoyment, she told herself. Auntie Bell was the only human thing in the neighbourhood whom, for her own sake, she really cared to see; Auntie Bell—and perhaps one other; but, although Mona often saw the doctor's gig in those days, she never chanced to meet the doctor.

A New Year dinner is not a very cheerful festivity in a somewhat uncongenial *solitude à deux*, and Mona was not sorry when an invitation came for Rachel to drink tea with a crony in the evening. She herself was included in the invitation, but had no difficulty in getting out of it. She was popular on the whole, among Rachel's friends, but there was a general consensus of opinion among them that, when

it came to a regular gossip over the fire, Miss Maclean, with all her cleverness, was a sad wet-blanket. Sally had been promised a half-holiday, and Rachel had some compunction about leaving her cousin alone, but Mona laughed at the idea.

"The arrangement suits me quite as well as it does you," she said; "I am going to take some of my mince-pies to old Jenny, and I have no doubt she will give me a cup of tea. She has been on my mind all day. It is glorious weather for a walk, and I shall have a full moon to light me home."

And in truth it was a glorious day for a walk. The thermometer had fallen abruptly after a heavy mist, and the great stretch of fields was perfectly white with the deepest hoar-frost Mona had ever seen. From every stone in the dyke, every blade of grass by the wayside, every hardy scrap of moss and lichen, the most exquisite ice-needles stood out in wonderful coruscations, sparkling and blazing in the slanting rays of the afternoon sun; a huge spider's web in the window of an old barn looked like some marvellous piece of fairy lacework; the cart-ruts in the more deserted roads were spanned by tiny rafters of ice; and above all, the moon, modest and retiring as yet, looked down from an infinitely distant expanse of pale, cloudless sky.

Very slowly the sun sank below the horizon, and the moon asserted herself more and more; till, when Mona reached the pine-wood, the mystic, unearthly beauty of the scene brought the actual tears into her eyes. The silence was broken only by sounds that served to gauge its depth; the recesses of the wood were as gloomy and mysterious as ever; but the moonlight streamed down on graceful tops and spreading branches, not burdened with massive whiteness, but transformed into crystal. A pine-wood in snow is a sight to be seen, but the work of the snow is only a daub, after all, when compared with the artist touch of a frost like this.

Mona scarcely knew how long she stood there, unwilling even to lean against the gate and so destroy its perfect

bloom; but she was disturbed at last by the sound of wheels on the carriage-drive. Had the Colonel come back? Was Jenny ill? And then with a quick flash of conviction she knew whom she was going to see.

It was Dudley, leading his horse by the bridle, and looking worn and anxious. He brightened up and quickened his step when he saw a woman's figure at the gate; then recognised who it was, and stopped short, with something like a groan. Poor Dudley! A moment before he would have given almost anything he possessed for the presence of a female human creature, and now that his prayer was granted, how he wished that it had been any other woman in the world than just this one whom the Fates had sent!

He had no choice, however, and he plunged into the matter at once, with white lips, but with a quick, resolute voice.

"I am in a sore dilemma, Miss Maclean," he said. "I was sent for suddenly up country to a case of arsenical poisoning; and, as I went past, they stopped me at those cottar-houses to tell me that there was a poor soul in extremity here. It's your little Maggie, by the way. Poor child! She may well ask herself whether life is worth living now! Of course I had to go on to my man, but I left him before I really ought to have done so, and now I must hurry back. The baby is just born."

"Is Jenny here?" Mona found it difficult to speak at all in the deafening rush of sorrow and bitterness that came over her.

"Jenny is away to Leith. Her brother's ship has just come in. The girl came home unexpectedly, and had to get the key of the house at the cottage. Everybody is down in the town celebrating the New Year, except a few infants, and an infirm old man, who noticed that she was ill and hailed me. Will you go in? There is no fire, nor comfort of any sort for the poor child. It is no work for you——"

Mona looked up with a curious light in her eyes.

"You don't really mean that," she said quietly. "If there were only a duchess on the road to-night, it would be

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keep him in life; and, in truth, I know not whether the woman or the doctor in her rejoiced more truly when she saw that all immediate danger was past.

All was peaceful, and Maggie, with the tears undried on her long eyelashes, had fallen asleep when Dudley came back.

"I don't know how to apologise for being so long away," he said, in a low voice. "Talk of Scylla and Charybdis!" He asked a few simple questions, and then, leading the way into the kitchen, he pushed forward the shabby old arm-chair for her, and seated himself on the corner of the table.

"I am afraid you are very tired," he said.

"Oh no!"

"You are reserving that for to-morrow?"

He would have liked to feel her pulse, both as a matter of personal and of scientific interest, but he did not dare.

"I wonder what poor little Maggie and I would have done without you to-night," he said. "As it is, I have had a close shave with my man. I found him a good deal collapsed when I went back,—cold and clammy, with blue lines round his eyes."

"What did you do?" said Mona eagerly, with a student's interest.

"You may well ask. One's text-books always fail one just at the point that offers a real difficulty in practice. They tell you how to get rid of and to neutralise the poison; they overwhelm you with Marsh's and Reinsch's tests; but how to keep the patient alive—that is a mere detail. Hot bottles were safe, of course, and 'in the right direction.' I was afraid to give stimulants, in case I should promote the absorption of any eddies of the poison, but finally I had to chance a little whisky-and-water, and that brought him round. I was very ill at ease about leaving you so long, but I thought some married woman from the cottar-houses would have been here before this."

"They won't come," said Mona. "I gave the old man a sovereign to hold his peace." And then she bit her lip, re-

membering that Miss Simpson's shop-girl could scarcely be supposed to have sovereigns to spare.

Dudley smiled,—a half-amused but very kindly smile, that reflected itself in a moment in Mona's face.

"Do you think it was foolish?" she asked simply.

"God forbid that I should criticise a woman's instinct in such a matter! With *my* powers of persuasion, I might as well have tried to hush up the death of a prince. I have long since decided that if I don't want people to talk about a thing, the best plan is to advertise it at once, then turn up the collar of my coat, fold my arms, and—thole."

"That is all very well when only one's self is concerned, but, by the time Jenny came back, no choice would have been left her."

"True. I might have known all along that you were right. It will be worth more than a sovereign to be able to tell Jenny that no one knows. And if she comes soon, the statement will do for the truth. Heigh-ho! do you know, I could throw my cap in the air, and hurrah like a schoolboy, when I think that my man has pulled through. A poisoning case is no joke, I can tell you; all hurry and confusion and uncertainty, with the prospect of a legal inquiry at the end of it. 'Do you mean to say, sir,'—Dudley adjusted an imaginary wig and weighed an imaginary eyeglass,—'that with a man's life at stake, you did so-and-so?' Ugh! who says a doctor's fees are easily earned? It would take many a jog-trot dyspepsia or liver complaint to restore the balance after that!"

"I am quite sure of it; and now I advise you to go home and get a night's rest if you can."

"But what am I to do about you? You don't suppose I am going to sleep the sleep of the unjust and leave you here?"

"That is precisely what you are going to do. An hour's forced march will do me no harm; you have had no lack of them lately. I will ask you to leave this note for my cousin, and if you have no objection, I think you might ask Jenny's

friend, Mrs Arnot—you know who I mean—to come up to-morrow morning. She is absolutely safe. Tell her to wait till the shops are open, and bring me the things I have jotted down here."

Maggie was awake by this time, and Dudley paid her a short visit before he left. The poor girl thought the gentleman very kind, but she was thankful when he was gone, and she was alone once more with Mona.

"I will tell you all how it was," she sobbed out convulsively.

"Not to-night, dear," Mona said quietly, stroking the thick brown hair. "When you are a little stronger, you shall tell me the whole story. To-night you must lie quite still and rest. I will take care of you."

It was a strange experience to sit there through the long hours, listening to the regular breathing of the young mother, the steady tick of the clock, and the occasional fall of a cinder from the grate. It seemed so incredible that this girl—this butterfly—had passed already, all frivolous and unprepared, through that tract of country which, to each fresh traveller, is only less new and mysterious than the river of death. A few months before, Mona had felt so old and wise, compared to that ignorant child; and now a great gulf of experience and of sorrow lay between them, and the child was on the farther side.

More and more heavily the burden of the sorrows of her sex pressed on Mona's heart as the night went on; more and more she longed to carry all suffering women in her arms; more and more she felt her unworthiness for the life-work she had chosen, till at last, half unconsciously, she fell on her knees and her thoughts took the form of a prayer.

CHAPTER XLII.

QUESTIONINGS.

When Mona first began her medical career, she was actuated partly by intense love of study and scientific work, partly by a firm and enthusiastic conviction that, while the fitness of women for certain spheres of usefulness is an open question, medical work is the natural right and duty of the sex, apart from all shifting standards and conventional views. Her repeated failure "took the starch out of her," as she expressed it, but I do not think that she ever for more than a moment seriously thought of giving up the work, when she laid it aside for a time; and her promise to Mr Reynolds was made, less out of gratitude to him than from a stern sense of duty. But now the cold hard lines of duty were broken through by the growing developing force of a living inspiration. We need many fresh initiations into a life-work that is really to move mankind, and Mona underwent one that night at Barntoun Wood, hundreds of miles away from the scene of her studies, with the silvered pines for a temple, the lonely house for a holy place, and a shrine of sin and sorrow. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these—" Who shall tell beforehand what events will form the epochs, or the turning-points, in the life of any one of us? Verily the wind bloweth where it listeth.

The night was over, and the morning sun was once more kindling all the ice-crystals into sparkles of light, when Mrs Arnot arrived—kind and motherly, but of course inexpressibly shocked. Mona conjured her not to have any conversation about the past that might agitate the patient; and then set out for home, promising to return before night. The ready tears welled up in Maggie's eyes as she watched her benefactress go; and then she turned her face to the wall and pretended to sleep. If she could only be with

Miss Maclean always, how easy it would be to be good; and perhaps in time she would even begin to forget—about *him*.

Since her illness Rachel had been very affectionate to her cousin, and Mona was quite unprepared for the torrent of indignation that assailed her when she entered the sitting-room. She had found Maggie ill at the Wood alone, she said, and almost in a moment Rachel guessed what had happened.

For some time Mona tried to discuss the question calmly, but the cutting, merciless words wounded her more than she could bear; so she rose and took her gloves from the table.

"That will do, cousin," she said coldly; "but for the accident of circumstances it might have been you or I."

This of course was a truism, but Rachel could not be expected to see it in that light, and the flames of her wrath leaped higher.

"Jenny can pay for a nurse from Kirkstoun," she said; "I'll not have you waiting hand and foot on a creature no decent woman would speak to. You'll not enter that house again."

"I've promised to go back this afternoon. Of course you have a perfect right, if you like, to forbid me to return here. But I am very tired, and I think it would be a pity, after all your kindness to me, to send me away with such an interpretation as this of the parable of the Good Samaritan. Unless you mention the incident, people will never find out that I had anything to do with it."

She left the room without giving her cousin time to reply. Before long Sally knocked at her door with a tolerably inviting breakfast-tray. Poor Rachel! She had never made any attempt to reduce her opinions and convictions to common principles, and it was very easy to defeat her with a weapon out of her own miscellaneous armoury. She was perfectly satisfied that the parable of the Good Samaritan had nothing to do with the case, but the mention of it reminded her of other incidents in the Gospel narrative which

seemed to lend some support to Mona's position. But then things were so different now-a-days. Was that wicked little minx to be encouraged to hold up her head again as if nothing her happened?

Not even for Jenny's sake could Mona stoop to beg her cousin to hold her peace, but Rachel had already resolved to do this for reasons of her own. She was shrewd enough to see that if the incident came out at all *at present*, it would come out in its entirety, and, rather than sacrifice "her own flesh and blood," she would spare even Maggie—for the present.

About mid-day Dudley arrived at the shop on foot.

"I thought the friendly Fates would let me find you alone," he said. "Your patients are thriving famously. I came to tell you that Jenny is to arrive at Kirkstoun to-night. I know it is asking a hard thing; but it would soften matters so for everybody else if you could meet her."

"Thank you so much for coming to tell me. I have been very unhappy about her home-coming. I am afraid I cannot do much, but I need not say I will do my best. I meant to go out this afternoon, but I will wait now, and go with Jenny. Poor soul! it will be an awful blow to her."

Dudley was looking at her fixedly. "Having expressed my delight at finding you," he said, "I am going to proceed, with true masculine inconsistency, to scold you for not taking a few hour's sleep. You look very tired."

"Appearances are deceptive."

"I am afraid Miss Simpson is not pleased with last night's work."

She hesitated, then smiled. "Miss Simpson is not the keeper of my conscience."

"Thank God for that at least! You will not stay for more than half an hour to-night?"

"I don't know."

"No, Miss Maclean, you will not," he said firmly; "I will not have it."

Her eyes sparkled with mischief. "Bear with my dulness,"

she said, "and explain to me your precise right to interfere. Is it the doctor's place to arrange how long the nurses are to remain on duty? I only ask for information, you know."

"Yes," he said boldly, "it is."

"Ah! so it becomes a simple matter of official duty. Thank you for explaining it to me."

Then suddenly the blood rushed up into her face. "Oh, Dr Dudley," she said impulsively, "what a brute I am to laugh and jest the moment I have turned my back on a tragedy like that!"

"And why?" he asked. "Do not the laughter and jesting, like the flowers and the sunshine, show that the heart of things is not all tragedy? If you and I could not laugh a little, in sheer healthy human reaction from too near a view of the seamy side of life, I think we should go mad; don't you?"

"Yes," she said earnestly.

"I think it is a great mistake to encourage mere feeling beyond the point where it serves as a motive. As we say in physiology that the optimum stimulus is the one that produces the maximum contraction; so the optimum feeling is not the maximum feeling, but the one that produces the maximum of action. Maggie is as safe with you as if she had fallen into the hands of her guardian angel. There is but little I can do, as the law does not permit us, even under strong provocation, to wring the necks of our fellow-men; but I will see Jenny to-morrow, and arrange about making the fellow contribute to the support of the child. Do you think you and I need to be afraid of an innocent laugh if it chances to come in our way?"

Dudley spoke simply and naturally, without realising how his sympathetic chivalrous words would appeal to a woman who loved her own sex. Mona tried to thank him, but the words would not come, so with an instinct that was half that of a woman, half that of a child, she looked up and paid him the compliment of the tears for which she blushed.

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"Hoot awa', Miss Maclean! You leddies dinna tak' weel wi' the like o' that. Feel the weicht o' it."

"That is nothing," said Mona, bracing her muscles to treat it like a feather. "I will take the bundle, too, if you like. And now, Jenny, I want to hear about your travels."

Her great fear was lest the old woman's suspicions should be aroused before they got out of the town, and she talked rather excitedly about anything that suggested itself. At last they passed the outskirts, and Mona drew a long breath of mingled relief and apprehension.

"It's an awfu' nicht," gasped Jenny, taking Mona's proffered arm, as a fierce gust of wind swept across the bare fields. "I nae ken hoo I'd win hame my lane. But what taks ye sae far on siccan a nicht?"

"I went out to see you last night," Mona answered irrelevantly, "but found you away."

"Eh, lassie, but I'm sair fashed! An' ye'd no' ken that the key was at the cottar-hoose? Ye micht hae gaed in, and rested yersel' a bit. I'd ask ye in the nicht, but the house is cauld, and nae doubt ye're gaun tae some ither body."

"Yes," said Mona, and then she rushed into the subject that occupied all her thoughts. "When did you last hear from Maggie?" she asked.

The old woman's face darkened. "I wadna wonner but there'll be a letter frae her at the cottar-hoose. I'm that ill pleased wi' her for no' writin'. It'll be sax weeks, come Monday, sin' I'd ony word. I'll no' ken a meenit's peace till her twel'month's oot in Feb'ry, and she's back at hame."

"Perhaps she is ill," said Mona deliberately.

Jenny peered up at her companion's face in the darkness.

"What gars ye say that?" she asked quickly.

"Jenny," said Mona, in a voice that shook with sympathy, "when I went out last night, I found Maggie at the house. She has come home."

She never could remember afterwards whether she added

anything more, or whether Jenny guessed at once what had befallen. There were a few quick imperious questions, and then the old woman dropped her bundle and burst into a torrent of wrath that made Mona's blood run cold. For some minutes she could scarcely understand a word of the incoherent outcry, but it was an awful experience to see the dim figure of the mother, standing there with upraised hands on the deserted road, calling down curses upon her child.

Presently she picked up her bundle, and walked on so swiftly that Mona could scarcely keep pace with her.

"Hoo daured she come hame?" she muttered. "Hoo daured she, hoo daured she? Could she no' bide whaur naebody kent her, and no' shame her auld mither afore a' the folk? The barefaced hussy! I'd ha' slammed the door i' her face. An' she'll oot o' the hoose this vera nicht, she an' the bairn o' her shame. There's no' room yonder for baith her an' me. I nae care what comes o' them. She suld ha' thocht o' that i' time. We maun e'en reap what we saw. Frae this day forrit she's nae bairn o' mine, and I'll no' lie doon ae nicht wi' a shameless strumpet unner my roof."

"If you turn her out of the house," Mona said quietly, "you will tell all the world what has happened. At present it is a secret."

Jenny's face brightened, but only for a moment.

"Ye needna pit yersel' aboot tae tell me the like o' that," she said bitterly. "Or maybe ye're but a lassie yet, and dinna ken hoo lang thae secrets is like tae be keepit. I niver keepit ane mysel', and it's no' likely ither folk are gaun to begin noo." Then she burst into a wailing cry, "Eh, Miss Maclean, I'm sair stricken! I can turn her oot o' my hoose, but I'll niver haud up my heid again. What's dune canna be undune."

"What is done cannot be undone," Mona answered very slowly; "but it can be made a great deal worse. The child did not know her trouble was so near, when she came

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very cold and very hungry, so I took the liberty of making some tea. I even think Maggie might be allowed to have some, very weak, if she promises faithfully not to talk any more to-night."

Jenny drank her hot tea, and her heart was cheered and comforted, in spite of all her burden of sorrow. Miss Maclean's friendship was at least something to set over against the talk of the folk; and—and—she thought she would read a chapter of her Bible that night; she would try to find the bit about Jesus and the woman. Had any one told Jenny beforehand that, so soon after hearing such dreadful news, her heart would have been comparatively at rest, she would have laughed the idea to scorn. Yet so it was. Poor old Jenny! The morrow was yet to come, with reflections of its own, with the return swing of the pendulum, weighted with principle and prejudice and old tradition; but in her simplicity she never thought of that, and for a few short hours she had peace.

CHAPTER XLIV.

A CRIMSON STREAK.

As soon as tea was over, Mona rose to go. Jenny begged her to stay all night, for the wind was howling most dismally through the pine-trees; but Mona laughed at the idea of danger or difficulty, and set out with a light heart. She had scarcely found herself alone, however, in the wild and gusty night, when she began to regret her own rashness. She was groping her way slowly along the carriage-drive, with the guidance of the hedge, when, with a sudden sense of protection, she caught sight of lamps at the gate.

Dudley came forward as soon as he heard her step.

promised to carry my old aunt off to warmer climes. I shan't be back here till August."

No answer. A sudden blast of wind swept along the road, and she instinctively laid hold of the shaft of the gig for support.

Dudley held out his hand.

"It is a high step," he said, "but I think you can manage it."

Mona took his hand almost unconsciously, tried to say something flippant, failed utterly, and took her seat in the gig without a word.

"Am I drugged?" she thought, "or am I going mad?"

Never in all her life had she so utterly failed in *savoir-faire*. She felt vaguely how indignant she would be next day at her own weakness and want of pride; but at the moment she only knew that it was good to be there with Dr Dudley.

He arranged the rug over her knees, and took the reins.

"Is this better than walking?" he asked in a low voice, stooping down to catch her answer.

Only for a moment she tried to resist the influence that was creeping over her.

"Yes," she said simply.

"Are you glad you came?"

And this time she did not try at all.

"Yes."

"That's good!" The reins fell loosely on the mare's back. "Peggy's tired," he said. "Don't hurry, old girl. Take your time."

Mona shivered nervously.

"You are cold," he said, taking a plaid from the back of the seat. Will you put this round you?"

"No, thank you; I am not really cold, and I have no hands. I should be blown away altogether if I did not hold on to this iron bar."

"Should you?" he said, with a curious intonation in his voice. "Take the reins."

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homewards. Mona could not speak, and Ralph rejoiced to think that he need not. When they reached Miss Simpson's door, he sprang down, lifted Mona to the ground, raised her hands to his lips, and stood there waiting, till the door had shut in the light.

CHAPTER XLV.

AN UNBELIEVER.

Mona did not see Dudley again before he left Borrowness. Strange as it may seem, she did not even wish to do so. Nothing could have added just then to the intensity of her life. For days she walked in a golden dream, performing her daily duties perhaps even better than usual, but with a constant sense of their unreality; and when at last outward things began to reassert their importance, she had much ado to bring her life into unison again.

Hitherto her experience had ebbed and flowed between fairly fixed limits; and now, all at once, a strong spring-tide had rushed up upon the beach, carrying cherished landmarks before it, and invading every sheltered nook and cranny of her being. She had fancied that she knew life, and she had reduced many shrewd observations to broad general principles; and now, behold, the relation of all things was changed, and for the moment she scarcely knew what was eternal rock and what mere floating driftwood.

"I feel," she said, "like a man who has lived half his life in a house that amply satisfies all his requirements, till one day by chance he touches a secret spring, and discovers a staircase in the wall, leading to a suite of enchanted rooms. He goes back to his study and laboratory and dining-room, and finds them the same, yet not the same; he can never forget that the enchanted rooms are there. He must annex

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parture became known; but perhaps no one felt it so keenly as Auntie Bell. The old woman expected little of men, and, as a rule, found in them as much as she expected. Of women she had constantly before her so lofty a type, in her hard-working, high-souled, keen-witted self, that her female neighbours were a constant source of disappointment to her. She had been prejudiced in Mona's favour for her father's sake, and the young girl had more than answered to her expectations. Miss Maclean had some stuff in her, the old woman used to say, and that was more than one could say of most of the lassies one met.

One day towards the end of February, Auntie Bell packed a basket with the beautiful new-laid eggs that were beginning to be plentiful, and set out, for the first time in many months, to pay a visit to Rachel Simpson. To her inward delight she met two of Mr Brown's sisters as she passed through the streets of Kilwinnie.

"Where are you going, Mrs Easson?" asked one. "It's not often we see you here now-a-days."

Auntie Bell looked keenly up through the gold-rimmed spectacles.

"Whaur wad I be gaun?" she asked grimly, "but tae see Miss Maclean? She's for leavin' us."

"Why is she going? I understood she was making herself quite useful to Miss Simpson in the shop."

"Quite usefu'!" Auntie Bell could scarcely keep her indignation within bounds. "I fancy she is quite usefu'—mair's the peety that the same canna be maintained o' some o' the lave o' us. Miss Simpson wad gie her een tae gar her bide, I'm thinkin'. But what is there here tae keep a leddy like yon? Hae ye no' mind what kin' o' mon her faither was? Div ye no' ken that she has siller eneuch an' tae spare? Ma certy! she's no' like tae say as muckle tae common country-folk like you an' me, an' Rachel Simpson yonder; but onybody can see, frae the bit w'ys she has wi' her, that she's no' used tae the like o' us!"

Having thus delivered her soul, Auntie Bell set her basket

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"It's no' that she complains," she said, "but——" her voice sank into an expressive whisper.

Mona listened attentively, and then asked a few questions.

"I wish I could come out with you and see her to-night," she said; "but a young woman has an appointment with me about the situation. I will walk out to-morrow and see your maid. It is very unlikely that I shall be able to do anything,—I know so little yet,—but her symptoms may be due to many things. If I cannot, you must either persuade her to see the doctor here; or, if she was able to be moved, I could take her with me when I go to Edinburgh, to the Women's Cottage Hospital."

"And what w'y suld ye pit yersel' aboot?"

Mona laughed. "It's my *business*," she said. "We all live for something."

"Na, na; if she doesna mend, she maun e'en see Dr Robertson. Maybe I've no' been sae firm wi' her as I suld ha' been; but I've nae opeenion o' doctors ava'. I'm ready tae dee when my time comes, but it'll no' be their pheesic that kills me."

Rachel came in at this moment, and the subject was dropped till Auntie Bell rose to go.

"To-morrow afternoon then," Mona said, as they stood at the garden-gate.

"Eh, lassie, I couldna hae been fonder o' ma ain bairn! Who'd iver ha' thocht it?—a wiselike, canny young crittur like you! Pit a' that nonsense oot o' yer heid!"

Mona laid her hands on the old woman's shoulders, and stooped to kiss the wrinkled brow.

"I would not vex you for the world, dear Auntie Bell," she said. "If you like, we will discuss it to-morrow afternoon."

"Na, na, there's naething tae discuss. Ye maun ken fine that the thing's no' *fut* for yer faither's bairn!" And with a heavy heart the old woman betook herself to the station.

"More by good luck than good guidance," Mona said, the medicine she prescribed for the farm-servant proved effectual, at least for the moment; and a simple tonic, aided by abundant good things from Auntie Bell's larder and dairy, soon brought back the glow of health to the pale cheeks. Auntie Bell looked very grave, and said not one word on the subject either to Mona or any one else; but the patient was less reticent, and, before Mona left Borrowness, she was infinitely touched by an appeal that came to her from a sick woman in Kilwinnie.

"I've niver been able tae bring mysel' tae speak o't," she said, as Mona sat by her bedside, "an' noo, I doot it's ower late; but they do say ye're no' canny, an' I thocht maybe ye culd help me."

Poor Mona! Very few minutes were sufficient to convince her that she could do nothing, that the case was far beyond her powers, if, indeed, not beyond the possibility of surgical interference.

"I am so sorry," she said, with a quiver in her voice; "but I know so little, it is no wonder I cannot help you. You must let me speak to the doctor. He is a good man, and he knows so much more than I do. I will tell him all about it, so he won't have to worry you or ask you questions. He will be able to lessen the pain very much, and—to do you good."

Her conscience reproached her for the last words, but they were received only with a sigh of infinite resignation.

"I made sure it was ower late," said the woman wearily; "but when I heard about Mrs Easson's Christie, I just thocht I wad speir at ye mysel'. It was awfu' guid o' ye tae come sae far."

Mona could find no words. Even the tragedy of Maggie's story faded into insignificance before the pathos of this; for Mona was young and strong, and life seemed to her very sweet.

"Thank God, I am going back to work!" she thought as she hastened home. "I want to learn all that one human

being can. It is awful to be buried alive in the coffin of one's own ignorance and helplessness."

Alas for the dreams of youth! We may work and strive, but do the coffin-walls ever recede so very far?

CHAPTER XLVI.

FAREWELL TO BORROWNESS.

Two great honours were in store for Mona before she left Borrowness.

In the first place, the Misses Brown paid her a formal call. They were arrayed in Sabbath attire, and were civil even to effusiveness; but they did not invite Mona to their house, nor suggest another excursion. Auntie Bell's remarks had had the intended effect of making them feel very small; but, on reflection, they did not see that they could have acted otherwise. It was a matter of comparative indifference to them whether their brother married a rich woman or a poor one; it was no part of their programme that he should marry at all. They found it difficult to predict exactly how he would be influenced by this fresh light on the situation; and, for the present, they did not think it necessary to tell him anything about it.

Some mysterious and exaggerated report, however, of "high connections" must certainly have got wind, or I cannot think that the second and greater honour would have fallen to Mona's share. It came in the form of a note on thick hand-made paper, embossed with a gorgeous crest.

"Mr and Mrs Cookson request the pleasure of Miss Maclean's company to dinner, &c."

Dinner! Mona had not "dined" for months. She tossed the note aside with a laugh.

"If my friend Matilda has not played me false," she said — "and I don't believe she has — this is indeed success!"

Her first impulse was to refuse, but she thought of Matilda's disappointment; and she thought, too, that Dr Dudley, knowing what he did of her relations with the girl, would think a refusal unworthy of her; so she showed the note to Rachel.

"Of course you'll go," was Rachel's immediate reply to the unspoken question. "But I do think, seeing how short a time we're to be together, they might have asked me too!"

Mona did not answer. She was strongly tempted at that moment to write and say she went nowhere without her cousin, but she could not honestly agree that the Cooksons might have invited Rachel too.

She ended by going, dressed with the utmost care, that she might not disappoint Matilda's expectations; and, on the whole, she was pleasantly surprised. There was less vulgar display than she had expected. Mrs Cookson was aggressively patronising, and Clarinda almost rude, but for that Mona had been prepared. Mr Cookson cared nearly as much for appearances as his wife did; but, as Mona had guessed, there was good wood under all the veneer. He was much pleased with Mona's appearance; his pleasure grew to positive liking when she expressed a preference for *dry* champagne; and when she played some of Mendelssohn's *Lieder*, from Matilda's well-thumbed copy, he became quite enthusiastic.

"I am afraid dear old Kullak's hair would stand on end, if he heard me," Mona said to the eager girl at her elbow, "and he would throw my music out of the window, as he did one day, when I thought I had surpassed myself." But there were many stages of musical criticism between Kullak and Mr Cookson.

"The girls have been playing those things to me for years," he said, "but I never saw any sense in them before.

It was all diddle-diddle, twang-twang. Now, when you play them, bless me! I feel as I did when Cook's man began to speak English to me, the first time I was at a French railway station."

With Matilda's handsome brother, Mona did not get on so well.

"Getting tired of your hobby, Miss Maclean?" he said, standing in front of her, and twirling his moustache.

Mona looked up with innocent eyes.

"Which hobby?" she said.

He laughed and changed the subject. He was not shy, but he had not the courage to specify shopkeeping.

All evening Matilda followed Mona like a shadow; taking her hand whenever she dared, and gazing up into her face with worshipping eyes. "It is too lovely having you here," she said, "but I can't forget it's the end of all things."

"Oh no, it is not," Mona answered. "You will be coming up to London one of these days, and perhaps your mother will let you spend a few days with me. In the meantime, I want you to spend a long afternoon with me to-morrow."

The long afternoon was in some respects a trying one, but that and most of the other farewells were over at length, and Mona was hard at work packing up.

"What a lifetime it seemed, six months ago!" she said, "and now that it is past—— And how little I ever dreamed that I should be so sorry to go!"

She had to find room for quite a number of keepsakes, and she almost wept over the heterogeneous collection. There were home-made needle-books and pin-cushions from the girls who had come to her for advice about bonnets, and situations, and husbands; there was a pair of gaudy beaded footstools, which Rachel had got as a bargain at the bazaar; there was a really beautiful Bible from the Bonthrons (how Mona longed to show it to Dr Dudley!); and from Matilda Cookson there was a wreath of shells and sea-weed picked

up near Castle Maclean, and mounted on cardboard, with these lines in the centre of the wreath—

"FROM

M. C.

IN GRATEFUL MEMORY

OF

THE HAPPIEST HOURS OF HER LIFE."

The inspiration was a happy one, and it had been carried out with much care, and a dash of art. Tradition and early education had of course to put in their say; and they did it in the form of a massive gold frame, utterly out of keeping with the simple wreath.

"Oh dear! why will people be so pathetic?" said Mona; but, if the gifts had been priceless jewels, she could not have packed them with tenderer care.

Then came the hardest thing of all, the parting with Rachel. A bright and competent young woman had been engaged in Mona's place, but Rachel could not be induced to hear a word in her favour.

"What's all that to me?" she sobbed; "it's not like one's own flesh and blood. You'd better never have come!"

Mona felt sure that the edge of this poignant grief would very soon wear off, but when the first bend in the railway had shut the limp, flapping handkerchief out of sight, she sank back in the comfortless carriage, feeling as if she had come to the end of a severe and protracted campaign.

She was too exhausted to read, and was thankful that by some happy chance she had no fellow-passengers. No mountains and fjords haunted her memory now; but instead—changing incessantly like a kaleidoscope—came a distorted phantasmagoria of perished elastic and ill-assorted knitting-needles; red-cushioned pews and purple bonnet-strings; suffering women in poor little homes; crowded bazaar and whirling ball-room; rocky coast and frosted pines; and—steady, unchanging, like the light behind the

rattling bits of glass—the wonderful, mystic glow of the suite of enchanted rooms.

Dusk was gathering when the train drew into the station. Yes; there stood Doris and the Sahib. Doris was looking eagerly in the direction of the coming train, and the Sahib was looking at Doris. But what a welcome they gave the traveller! A welcome that drove all the phantasmagoria out of her head, and made her forget that she was anything other than Doris's sister, the friend of the Sahib, and—something to somebody else.

"Ponies and pepper-pot still to the fore?" she said, as they crossed the platform.

"Oh yes; but a horrible fear has seized me lately that the pepper-pot is beginning to grow."

"Are you not coming with us?" Mona asked, as the Sahib arranged the carriage-rug.

He looked down at his great athletic figure with a good-humoured smile.

"How is it to be done?" he asked, "unless I put the whole toy in my pocket—dolls and all. Miss Colquhoun has been kind enough to ask me to dinner. I am looking forward to meeting you then."

Scarcely a word passed between the friends as they drove home, and Mona was glad to lie down and rest until dinner-time.

"Welcome, Miss Maclean!" cried Mr Colquhoun as she entered the drawing-room. "You've come in the very nick of time to give me your opinion of a new microtome I want to buy. I could not have held out another day. Why, I declare you are looking bonnier than ever!"

"She is looking five years younger," said Doris.

"Since we *are* making personal remarks," said the Sahib, "I should have said older, but that does not prevent my agreeing cordially with Mr Colquhoun."

Mona's laugh only half concealed her rising colour.

"Older has it," she said, nodding to the Sahib. "Score!"

As they went in to dinner, she looked round at the un-

pretentious perfection of the room and the table, with a long sigh of satisfaction.

"There is no house in the world," she said, "where I have precisely the sense of restfulness that I have here. Nothing jars; I don't need to talk unless I like; and I can afford to be my very own self."

"That's a good hearing," said Mr Colquhoun heartily. "Have some soup!"

The two gentlemen kept the ball going between them most of the time, for Doris never talked much except in a *solitude à deux*. And yet how intensely she made her presence felt, as she sat at the head of the table,—sweet, gracious, almost childlike, her fair young face scarcely giving a hint of the strength and enthusiasm that lay behind it!

"I can hardly believe that I am to have you for a whole week," she said, following Mona into her bedroom, and rousing the fire; "it is too good to be true. And I am so glad you are going back to your work!"

"So am I, dear," said Mona simply.

"Of course! I knew you would come back to the point you started from."

Mona smiled. "You are determined not to make it a spiral, I see. Ah, well! taking it as a circle, it is a bigger one than I imagined."

Her words would not have struck Doris but for the tone in which they were unconsciously spoken.

"What has biggened it?" she said, looking up from the fire.

Mona's hands were clasped beneath her head on the low back of her arm-chair, and her eyes were fixed on the ceiling.

"I don't know," she said. "Many things. How is Maggie getting on?"

"Famously. Laurie says she will make a first-rate cook. You should have seen the child's face when I told her you were coming! I am so grateful to you, Mona, for giving me a chance to help her. There is so little that one can do! —that I can do at least! She is a sweet little thing, and so

pretty. When I think of that man——" her face crimsoned, and she stopped short.

"Don't think of him, dear," said Mona. "It is no use; and, you know, you must not spoil Maggie."

Doris bent low over the fire, and the tears glistened on her long eyelashes. She tried to wink them away, but it was no use; and, after all, there was only Mona there to see, and Mona was almost a second self. She pressed her handkerchief hard against her eyes for a moment, and then turned to her friend with a smile.

"What a time you must have had of it that night at the Wood! I *was* proud of you!"

"I wish you had more cause, dear. My duties were simple in the extreme."

"And the country doctor — what did he say when he found how you had risen to the occasion?"

Mona's eyes were fixed on the ceiling again.

"I don't think he said anything that is likely to live in history. I believe he ventured to suggest that Maggie might have some beef-tea."

This, as Dudley could have testified, was a pure fabrication.

"I don't suppose he would be man enough to admit it, but he must have seen that you were in your proper place there—not he."

Mona opened her lips to reply, and then closed them again.

"Maggie has not been my only patient by any means," she said finally. "I have had no end of practice. I assure you I might have set up my carriage, if I had been paid for it all. Oh, Doris, it is sad work sometimes!" and she told the story of the last patient she had had.

"Poor soul! Glad as I am that you have left that place, I don't know how you could bring yourself to leave her."

"No more do I, quite."

"You could not have brought her into Edinburgh?"

Mona shook her head. "Too late!" she said.

"It must have been dreadful to give her over, after all, to a man. I don't know how you could do it."

"That's because you don't know how kind he is, how he met me half-way, and made my task easy. It was the Kilwinnie doctor, you know, an elderly man." Mona sprang to her feet, and leaned against the mantelpiece. "At the risk of forfeiting your esteem for ever, Doris, I must record my formal testimony that the kindness I have met with at the hands of men-doctors is almost incredible. When I think how nice some of them are, I almost wonder that we women have any patients at all!"

"*Nice!*" said Doris quietly, but with concentrated scorn. "It's their *trade* to be *nice*. I never consulted a man-doctor in my life, and I never will; but if by any inconceivable chance I were compelled to, I would infinitely prefer a boor to a man who was *nice!*"

Mona laughed. "Dear old niceness," she said, "I won't have him abused. When all is said, he is so much more attractive than most of the virtues. And before we banish him from the conversation,—how do you like the Sahib?"

Doris's face brightened.

"*He* believes in women-doctors," she said.

"Ay, and in all things lovely and of good report." Mona was forgetting her resolution.

"He has very wholesome views on lots of subjects," Doris went on reflectively.

"Have you seen much of him?"

"A good deal. He is very much interested in the things my father cares about. I quite understand now what you meant when you said he was the sort of man one would like to have for a brother."

This was disappointing, and Mona brought the conversation to a close.

Every day during her visit the Sahib came in for an hour or two, sometimes to lunch or dinner, sometimes to escort "the girls" to a lecture or concert. He was uniformly kind and brotherly to both, but Mona fancied that at times he was sorely ill at ease.

"If only he would show a little common-sense," she thought, "and let the matter drop altogether, what a relief it would be for both of us!"

But this was not to be.

On Sunday afternoon Doris had gone out to teach her Bible-class, Mr Colquhoun was enjoying his weekly afternoon nap, and Mona was sitting alone by the fire in the library, half lost in a mighty arm-chair, with a book on her knee.

Suddenly the door opened, and the Sahib entered unannounced.

"You are alone?" he said, as though he had not counted on finding her alone.

"Yes," said Mona, and she tried in vain to say anything more. It was Sunday afternoon.

Somewhat nervously he lifted the book from her lap and glanced at the title-page.

"Your choice of literature is exemplary," he said, seating herself beside her.

"I am afraid the example begins and ends with the choice, then," said Mona, colouring. "I have not read a line; I was dreaming."

He looked at her quickly.

"Miss Maclean," he said, making a bold plunge, "I have come for my answer."

Mona raised her eyes.

"What answer do you want, Mr Dickinson?" she said quietly.

If the Sahib had been absolutely honest he would have replied, "Upon my soul, I don't know!" but there are moments when the best of men think it necessary to adapt the truth to circumstances. Before Mona came to Edinburgh he had certainly regretted those hasty words of his at the ball; but, now that he was in her presence again, now especially that he was alone in her presence, the old charm returned with all its force. Doris was a pearl, but Mona was a diamond; Doris was spotless, but Mona was crystalline. If only he had met either of these women three years ago,

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the words with perfect truth, but were they true now? The question flashed like lightning through her mind, and the Sahib watched her with intense interest while she answered it. Her face grew very pale, and her lips trembled. She leaned her arm against the mantelpiece.

"Sahib," she said, "life gets so complicated, and it is so difficult to tell what one is bound to say. You asked me if —if—there was somebody else. There is somebody else; there was then. I did not lie to you. I did not know. And even now—he—has not said——"

She broke off abruptly, and left the room.

The Sahib lifted up the book she had laid down, and carefully read the title-page again, without really seeing one word. The question had indeed been settled for him, and at that moment he would have given wellnigh everything he possessed, if he could have been the man to win and marry Mona Maclean.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE DISSECTING-ROOM.

It was the luncheon-hour, and the winter term was drawing to a close. The dissecting-room was deserted by all save a few enthusiastic students who had not yet wholly exhausted the mysteries of Meckel's ganglion, the branches of the internal iliac, or the plantar arch. For a long time a hush of profound activity had hung over the room, and the silence had been broken only by the screams of a parrot and the cry of the cats'-meat-man in the street below; but by degrees the demoralising influence of approaching holidays had begun to make itself felt; in fact, to be quite frank, the girls were gossiping.

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"Oh, Glasgow," said the investigator of the internal iliac, almost impatiently. "I need all the time I can get. I have not begun to read the brain and special sense. Where can one get a bullock's eye?"

"At Dickson's, I fancy."

"And where can one see a dissection of the ear? It is so unsatisfactory getting it up from books."

"There is a model of it in the museum."

"*Model!*" The word was spoken with infinite contempt.

"Do you know what it is, Miss Philips? You are thrown away on those Scotch examinations. Why did you not go in for the London degree?"

"Matric.," was the laconic response.

"Oh, the Matric. is nothing!"

"Besides, I could not afford the time. Six years, even if one was lucky enough not to get ploughed."

"Talking of being ploughed," said a student who had just entered the room, "you won't guess whom I have just met?—Miss Maclean."

"Miss Maclean?—in London?"

"In the chemical laboratory at the present moment. She is going up for her Intermediate again, in July."

"Who is Miss Maclean?" asked the girl who had been studying the skeleton.

There was a general exclamation.

"Not to know her, my dear," said the new-comer, "argues yourself—quite beneath notice. Miss Maclean is one of the Intermediate Chronics."

"Miss Maclean is an extremely clever girl," said Miss Warden.

"When I first came to this school," said Miss Philips, "I wrote to my people that women medical students were very much like other folks, but that one or two were really splendid women; and I instanced Miss Maclean."

"The proof of the student is the examination."

"That is not true—except very broadly. You passed your

Intermediate at the first go-off, but none of us would think of comparing you to Miss Maclean."

"Thank you," was the calm reply. "I always did appreciate plain speaking. It is quite true that I never went in for very wide reading, nor for the last sweet thing in theories; but I have a good working knowledge of my subjects all the same—at least I had at the time I passed."

"Miss Maclean is too good a student; that is what is the matter with her."

The dissector of Meckel's ganglion laughed. "Miss Maclean is awfully kind and helpful," she said; "but I shall never forget the day when I asked her to show me the nerve to the vastus externus on her own dissection. She drew aside a muscle with hooks, and opened up a complicated system of telephone wires that made my hair stand on end."

"I know. For one honest nerve with a name, she shows you a dozen that are nameless; and the number of abnormalities that she contrives to find is simply appalling."

"In other words, she has a spirit of genuine scientific research," said Miss Philips. "It does not say much for the examiners that such a woman should fail."

A student who had been studying a brain in the corner of the room, looked up at this moment, tossing back a mass of short dark hair from her refined and intellectual face.

"Poor examiners," she said. "Who would wish to stand in their shoes? Miss Maclean may be a good student, and she may have a spirit of genuine scientific research; but nobody fails for either of those reasons. Miss Maclean sees things very quickly, and she sees them in a sense exactly. She puts the nails in their right places, so to speak, and gives them a rap with the hammer; she fits in a great many more than there is any necessity for, but she does not drive them home. Then, when the examination comes, some of the most essential ones have dropped out, and have to be looked for all over again. It was a fatal mistake, too, to begin her Final work before she had passed her Inter-

mediate. I don't know what subject Miss Maclean failed in, but I am not in the least surprised that she failed."

Her audience heard the last sentence in a kind of nightmare; for Mona had entered the room, and was standing listening, a few yards behind the speaker. The girl turned round quickly, when she saw the conscious glances.

"I did not know you were there, Miss Maclean," she said proudly, indignant with herself for blushing.

Mona drew a stool up to the same table, and sat down.

"It is I who ought to apologise, Miss Lascelles," she said, "for listening to remarks that were not intended for me; but I was so much interested that I did not stop to think. One so seldom gets the benefit of a perfectly frank diagnosis."

"I don't know that it was perfectly frank. Some one was abusing the examiners, and I spoke in hot blood——"

"It seems to me that statements made in hot blood are the only ones worth listening to—if we have a germ of poetry in us. Statements made in cold blood always prove to be truisms when you come to analyse them."

"And one thing I said was not even true—I *was* surprised when you failed."

Mona was not listening. "What you said was extremely sensible," she said, "but so neatly put that one is instinctively on one's guard against it. It is a dreary metaphor—driving in nails; and, if it be a just one, it describes exactly my quarrel with medicine, from an examination point of view. Why does not one big nail involve a lot of little ones? Or rather, why may we not develop like trees, taking what conduces to our growth, and rejecting the rest? Why are we doomed to make pigeon-holes, and drive in nails?"

"But the knowledge a doctor requires is in a sense unlike any other. He wants it, not for himself, but for other people."

"And so we come back to the eternal question, whether a man benefits humanity more by self-development or self-sacrifice? Does knowledge that is fastened on as an appendage ever do any good? Have not the great specialists, the

men of genius, who are looked upon as towers of strength, worked mainly at the thing they enjoyed working at?"

"Yes," said Miss Lascelles, "but they passed their examinations first."

Mona laughed. "True," she said, "I own the soft impeachment; and there you have the one and only argument in favour of girls beginning to study medicine when they are quite young. It is so easy for them to get up facts and tables."

"I think one requires to get up less, in the way of facts and tables, for the London than for any other examination. It is more honest, more searching, than any other."

Mona smiled—a very sad little smile. "Perhaps," she said.

"I don't know what you mean by knowledge that is fastened on as an appendage never doing any good," said the girl who held that the proof of the student was the examination; "I don't profess to have found any mysterious food for my intellectual growth in the action and uses of rhubarb, but I don't find rhubarb any the less efficacious on that account when I prescribe it."

"But you open up a pretty wide field for thought when you ask yourself, Why rhubarb rather than anything else?"

"It is cheap," said the girl frivolously, "and it is always at hand."

No one vouchsafed any reply to this.

"You have surely done enough to those brain sections for one day, Miss Lascelles," said Mona; "won't you come and lunch with me? It is only a few minutes' walk to my rooms."

The girl hesitated. "Thank you," she said suddenly—"I will. I shall be ready in five minutes."

She slipped from her high stool, and stood putting away her things—a tiny figure scarcely bigger than a child, yet full of character and dignity.

"In the meantime come and demonstrate this tiresome old artery, Miss Maclean," said Miss Philips. "I am getting hopelessly muddled."

"If you knew the surroundings in which I have spent the last six months," said Mona, smiling, "you would not expect me to know more than the name of the internal iliac artery. I shall be very glad to come and look at your dissection though, if I may."

"You see I have not forgotten the kindness you showed me when I first began."

"I don't remember any kindness on my part. You were kind enough to let me refresh my memory on your dissection, I know."

"That's one way of putting it. Do you remember my asking you how closed tubes running through the body could do it any good?"

"Yes; and I remember how delighted I was with the intelligence of the question. Heigh-ho! what a child you seemed to me then!"

She took the forceps in her hand, and in a moment the old enthusiasm came back.

"How very interesting!" she said. "Look at this deep epigastric."

And a quarter of an hour had passed before she remembered her guest and her luncheon.

"I am so sorry," she said, pulling off the sleeves she had donned for the moment. "Is anybody going to dissect during the summer term? Shall I be able to get a part?"

The two girls walked home together to Mona's rooms, Miss Lascelles's diminutive figure, in its half-æsthetic, half-babyish gown and cape, forming a curious contrast to that of her companion.

"I really do apologise most humbly for my thoughtlessness," said Mona.

"Don't," replied the other, swinging her ungloved hand and raising her slow pleasant voice more than was necessary in the quiet street; "one does not see too much enthusiasm in the world. It is good to have you back."

"I feel rather like a Rip Van Winkle, as you may suppose."

"Yes. The students seem to get younger every year. It is a terrible pity. One does not see how they are ever to take the place of some of the present seniors. What can they know of life?"

"And, as a natural consequence, the supply of medical women will exceed the demand in the next ten years—in this country. After that, things will level themselves, I suppose; but at present, if a woman is to succeed, she must be better than the average man."

"Whereas at present we are getting mainly average women, and of course the average woman is inferior to the average man."

"Heretic!"

"Oh, but wait till women have had their chance! When they are really educated, things will be very different."

"Do you think so? If I did not believe in women as they are now, apart from a mythical *posse*, I should be miserable indeed. I have a great respect for higher education, but there is such a thing as Mother Nature as well."

"Even Mother Nature has only had her say for half the race."

They entered the house, and presently sat down to the luncheon-table.

"Explanations are always a mistake," said Miss Lascelles suddenly.

"Always," said Mona, "and especially when there is no occasion for them."

"——but I should like to tell you that I thought out that nail metaphor (God forgive the term!) in relation to myself originally. It is because I am so familiar with that weakness in myself, that I recognised, or fancied I recognised, it in you. I think our minds are somewhat alike, though, of course, you have a much fresher and brighter way of looking at things than I."

"——and I am the profounder student," she added mentally.

"Explanations are not always a mistake," said Mona.

"It was very kind of you to make that one. I should be glad to think my cast of mind was like yours, but I am afraid it is only the superficial resemblance which Giuseppe's violins bore to those of the master."

"It is pleasant, is it not, to leave dusty museums now and then, and feel Science growing all around one? And what I love about London University is, that it allows for that kind of thing in its Honours papers. It is a case of 'This ought ye to have done, and not have left the other undone.' But it is difficult to find time for both."

"Ay, especially when one has to find time for so many other things as well."

"Yes. I feel that intensely. I hate to be insulated. I must touch at more points than one. But I do try to work conscientiously, or rather I don't try. It is my nature. Study is a pure delight to me."

"I expect you will be taking honours in all four subjects."

"I find it a great help in any case to do the honours work: it is so much more practical and useful; but it does take a lot of time. I find it impossible to work more than ten hours a day——"

Mona laid down the fish-slice in horror.

"Ten hours a day!" she exclaimed.

"Yes; I tried twelve, but I could not keep it up."

"I should hope not. I call eight hours spurting. I only read for six, as a rule, and for the last fortnight before an examination, only two."

"Why?"

"I can't read at the end. That is the ruin of me. Up to the last fortnight, I seem to know more than most of my fellow-students; but then I collapse, while they—they withdraw into private life. What mystic rites and incantations go on there I can't even divine; but they emerge all armed *cap-à-pie*, conquering and to conquer, while I crawl out from my lethargy to fail."

"You have the consolation of knowing that you really know your work better than they."

Lascelles was gone; "but I hope she will tell me what is the matter. Poor little soul!"

It was pretty late in the evening when Lucy arrived, pale and tired. "I have kept you waiting for dinner," she said; "I am so sorry. A fractured skull came in just as I was leaving, and I waited to see them trephine. They don't think it will be successful, and—it made me rather faint. But it's an awfully neat operation."

Mona went to the table and poured out a glass of wine. "Drink that," she said, "and then come to my bedroom and have a good splash. I will do all the talking during dinner; and when you are quite rested, you shall tell me the news."

"Life will be a different thing, now you are back," Lucy said, as they seated themselves at the table. "What lovely flowers!"

"You ought to admire them. Aunt Maud sent them from your beloved Cannes. I do so admire that Frisia. It is white and virginal, like Doris."

The last remark was added hastily, for at the mention of Cannes, Lucy had blushed violently and incomprehensibly.

"I was at the School to-day," Mona went on.

"Were you really? It must have been horrid going back."

"It was very horrid to find the organic solutions in the chemical laboratory at such a low ebb. But I suppose they will be filled up again for the summer term."

"Oh, you know all those stupid old tests!"

"It is precisely the part of the examination that I am most afraid of. I have not your luck—or power of divination. Why don't they ask us to find whether a hydroxyl group is present in a solution, or something of that kind?"

"Thank heaven, they don't!"

"I wonder what a scientific chemist would say, if he were asked to identify two organic mixtures in an hour and a half!"

"I did it in half an hour."

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that gives relief to my injured feelings." And she brou
her closed fist on the table with a force that sent a ru
glow across her white knuckles.

"And now," she said, "it is your innings. I w
know so many things. How do you like hospital

"Oh, it is awfully interesting;" but Lucy's ma
not enthusiastic. "I spotted a presystolic murm
day."

"H'm. Who said it was a presystolic? '
find it very cold coming back to London fr
South?"

Lucy shivered again. "It was horrid," s

"And you really had a good, gay, light-h

It was a full minute before the girl ans
she said hurriedly and emphatically.
I—I was not thinking."

"That is just what you were doing
thoughts."

Again there was a silence. Evid
tempted to make a clean breast of

"I am in my father's black boo

Mona looked at her searchingl
true, she did not doubt; but th
Lucy's evident depression, she

"How have you contrived t

"It is not such a remarkal
to Monte Carlo with the M

"Did he object?"

"Awfully! You see,
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Mr Wilson, one of the
story leaked out."

"But you did not

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think so much of
objects to."

"Just for once?"

"Just for once. He said you would not have gone."

"That is a profound mistake. I want very much to see a gambling-saloon, and I certainly should have gone. I will tell him so the first time I see him."

"Oh, Mona, don't! What is the use? Two blacks don't make a white."

"Truly; but, on the other hand, you can't make a black white by painting it. Your father thinks me so much better than I am, that he binds me over to be honest with him. Besides, I want to defend my point. Of course, I should not go if I thought it wrong. But, Lucy, that is not a thing to worry about. It can't be undone now, even if you wished it; and your father would be the last man in the world to want you to distress yourself fruitlessly. Of all the men I know, he is the most godlike, in his readiness to say, 'Come now, and let us reason together.'"

"I am not distressing myself," Lucy said, brightening up with an evident effort. "Did I ever tell you, Mona, about the boy we met at Monte Carlo? He had got into a fix and was nearly frantic. We begged Lady Munro to speak to him, and she invited him to Cannes, and ultimately she and Sir Douglas sent him home. But it was such fun! He proved to be a medical student, a St Kunigonde's man. I was alone in the sitting-room when he called,—such a pretty sunny room it was, with a sort of general creamy-yellow tone that made my peacock dress simply lovely! Of course we fell to comparing notes. He goes in for his second examination at the Colleges in July, and you should have seen his face when I told him I had passed my Intermediate M.B. Lond.! I really believe it had never occurred to him that any woman under thirty, and devoid of spectacles, could go in for her Intermediate. He is coming to see me at the Hall."

A poorer counterfeit of Lucy's racy way of telling a story could scarcely have been imagined. Mona wondered much, but she knew now that nothing more was to be got out of her friend that night.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

CONFIDENCES.

It was a hot day in June, and "blessed Bloomsbury" was converted into one great bakehouse. The flags in Gower Street radiated out a burning glow; the flower-sellers had much ado to preserve the semblance of freshness in their dainty wares; and those of the inhabitants who were the proud possessors of outside blinds were an object of envy to all their neighbours.

Mona was sitting at her writing-table, pen in hand, and with a formidable blue schedule before her. She was looking out of the window, but in her mind's eye the dusty, glaring street had given place to the breezy ramparts of Castle Maclean; and, instead of the noise of the traffic, she heard the soft plash of the waves. Presently she laid down her pen, and leaned against the scorching window-sill, with a smile, not on her lips, but in her eyes.

> "My spirit and my God shall be
> My seaward hill, my boundless sea,"

she quoted softly.

"What, Mona, caught poetising!" said Lucy unceremoniously entering the room.

"Far from it," said Mona drily. "I was engaged on the most prosaic work it is possible to conceive, filling in the schedule for my Intermediate. It seems to me that I have spent the greater part of my life filling in the schedule for my Intermediate. If I fail again I shall employ an amanuensis for the sole purpose. Come and help me. Full Christian name and surname?"

"Mona Margaret Maclean."

"Oh, drop the Margaret! I am prepared to take the chance of there being another Mona Maclean. Age, last birthday?"

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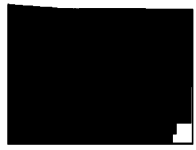

took the girl's face between her hands, and turned it to the light. She was not mistaken. The pretty eyes were dim with tears.

"Lucy," she said, "you and I have pretended long enough. What is the use of friendship, if we never fall back upon it in time of need? I want you to tell me what it was that spoilt your visit to Cannes."

"Nothing," said Lucy, with burning face, "unless, perhaps, my own idiocy. Oh, Mona, you dear old bully, there is not anything to tell! I thought I was always going to get the best of it with men, and now a man has got the best of it with me. It's only fair. Now you know the whole story. Despise me as much as you like."

"When I take to despising people, I imagine I shall have to begin even nearer home than with my plucky little Lucy. Will it be any use to tell me about it, do you think? Or is the whole story better buried?"

"I can't bury it. And yet there is positively nothing to tell. When I look back upon it all, I cannot honestly say that the flirtation went any farther than half-a-dozen others have gone; but this time, somehow, everything was different."

"Is he a friend of the Munros?"

Lucy nodded. "Yes—you know—Mr Monteith. He arrived at the hotel the night of our first dance. I was wearing my mermaid costume for the first time, and—I saw him looking at me again and again. He was not particularly handsome, but there was a sort of bloom about him, don't you know? He made me feel so common and work-a-day. And then when I danced with him I felt as if I had never danced with a man in my life before. I did not see very much of him;—Lady Munro was so particular;—but one afternoon a party of us walked up to the chapel on the hill, and he and I got apart from the others somehow. It was the first time I had seen the Maritime Alps, and I never again saw them as they were that day in the sunset light. It was like looking into a golden future. Well, he went away. I was awfully low-spirited for a day or two; but

somehow, whenever I thought of that evening on the hill, I felt as if the future was full of beautiful possibilities. One day we went to Monte Carlo, and there I met him again. He asked if I would like him to come back for a day or two to Cannes, and I said I did not care. He never came. Sometimes I wish I had begged him to,—yes, Mona, I have sunk as low as that—and sometimes I think he must have read my poor little secret all along, and I could kill myself for very shame. Oh, Mona, I wish you could take me out of myself!"

"You poor little soul! Lucy, dear, it sounds very trite and commonplace; but, by hook or by crook, you must get an interest in your hospital work, and go at it as hard as ever you can."

"It is no use. I hate hospital. I wonder now how I ever could care so much about prizes and marks and examinations. It is all such child's-play."

"Yes; but sorrow is not child's-play, and pain and death are not child's-play. It is only a question of working at it hard enough, old woman. You are bound to become interested in it in time, and that is the only way to get rid of yourself;—though it is strange teaching, perhaps, to come from self-centred me. They say we women of this generation have sacrificed a good deal of our birthright; don't let us throw away the grand compensation, the power to light our candles when the sun goes down. Do you remember Werther's description of the country lass whose sweetheart forsakes her, taking with him all the interest in her life? We at least have other interests, Lucy, and we can, if we try hard enough, turn the key on the suite of enchanted rooms, and live in the rest of the house."

"The rest of my house is a poky hole!"

Mona sighed sympathetically. "No matter," she said resolutely; "we must just set to work, and make it something better than a poky hole."

Further conversation was prevented for the time by the entrance of the luncheon-tray.

"Well, is it to be Richmond?" said Mona, when the meal was over.

Lucy blushed. "I have a great mind to go to hospital, after all," she said. "I don't think it is quite so hot as it was."

"No, I think there is a suspicion of a breeze. *Au revoir!* Come back soon."

I wish I could honestly say that Mona profited as much by Lucy's example as Lucy had by Mona's preaching; but I am forced to record that she did not open a book, nor return to her little laboratory, for the rest of the day. For a long time she sat in her rocking-chair with a frown on her brow. "I wonder if he has only been playing with her," she said—"the cad!" Then another thought crossed the outskirts of her mind. At first it scarcely entered the limits of her consciousness; but, like the black dog in *Faust*, it went on and on, in ominous, ever-narrowing circles, and she was forced to recognise that she must grapple with it sooner or later. Then she put up her hands to cover her face, although there was no one there to see, and the question sounded in her very ears—"What if *he* has only been playing with *me*?"

What then, Mona? Lock the door on the suite of enchanted rooms, and live in the rest of the house! But she never thought of her advice to Lucy. She threw herself on the couch, and lay there for a little while in an agony of shame. After all her lofty utterances, had she given herself away to a man who had not even asked for her? Why had he not spoken just one word, to save her from this torture?

By some curious chain of associations the words flashed into her mind—

> "Denn, was man schwarz auf weiss besitzt,
> Kann man getrost nach Hause tragen."

She laughed a little breathlessly, and drew her hand across her damp forehead.

"I am a fool and a coward," she said; "I will ask Dr

Alice Bateson to give me a tonic. What do mere words matter, after all, between people like him and me?"

She walked up to a calendar that hung on the wall, and carefully counted the days till the second week in August. Then she sighed regretfully.

"Poor little Lucy," she said, "what an unsympathetic brute she must have thought me!"

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE INTERMEDIATE.

The classic precincts of Burlington House were once more invaded by a motley crowd of nervous, excited young men, who hung about the steps and entrance-hall, poring over their note-books, exchanging "tips," or coolly discussing the points of the women.

"None of them are so good-looking as the little girl with the red hair, who was up last year," Mona overheard one of them say, and she made a mental note to inform Lucy of her conquest.

About half-a-dozen girls were already assembled in the cloak-room when she entered.

"Well, Miss Maclean, how are you feeling?"

"Hardened," said Mona, taking off her hat, but she did not look particularly hardened.

"'In my heart if calm at all,
If any calm, a calm despair,'"

quoted Miss Lascelles.

"Do tell me about the cardiac branches of the pneumogastric," said some one.

Miss Lascelles proceeded to give the desired information, while the others discussed the never-settled question of the number of marks required for a pass.

"It seems to me that *x* equals the most you can make plus one," and Mona sighed resignedly.

"Now, ladies, please," said an imposing individual in broadcloth, and the little party was marshalled through the hall to the examination-room.

"Why has Miss Maclean done her hair like that?" said a student with a mind at leisure from itself. "It is not half so becoming as the old way."

Nor was it. Mona had made the alteration in order to change the outline of her head as much as possible, for she was most anxious that Dr Dudley should not recognise her, in surroundings that did not admit of an explanation on her part. She did not venture to raise her eyes as she entered the room, and as soon as she was seated, she bent low over the pink and green *cahiers* that lay on her desk. A minute later the examination papers were distributed, and for three hours neither Dudley nor any other human being had any existence for her. She wrote on till the last moment—wrote on, in fact, till the examiner, Dudley's "monument of erudition," came up and claimed her paper.

"I think I have seen you before," he said kindly.

"Twice," said Mona smiling, "and I am afraid you are in a fair way to see me again."

He looked at her with some amusement and interest in his shrewd Scotch face.

"I don't think you are much afraid of that." he said.

Mona followed him with her eye, as he turned away, and in another moment saw him at the other end of the room, shaking hands very cordially with Dr Dudley. She turned her back, and, hastily gathering together her pens and coloured chalks, she left the room. Her heart beat fast with apprehension till she reached the open air; and, as she walked up to Regent Street for lunch, she fancied every moment that she heard his step behind her.

But she need not have feared. For the three days that the written examination lasted, Dudley was aware of a patch of colour at the opposite side of the hall, where the

women sat; but he was too indifferent and preoccupied to investigate its details. He felt so old among those boys and girls; his one wish was to get the examination over, and be done with it.

Now that she knew where he sat, Mona had no difficulty in avoiding his short-sighted eyes. In fact, as time went on, she grew bolder, and loved to look on from a distance, while Dudley's fellow-students gathered round and assailed him with a torrent of questions, the moment each paper was over. It was pleasant to see his relations with those lads, —the friendly raillery which they took in such good part. Clearly they looked upon him as a very good fellow, and a mine of wisdom.

"You are mere boys to him," thought Mona proudly. "He is willing to play with you; but I am his friend!"

Wednesday evening came at last, and with a mingled sense of excitement, and of weariness that amounted to physical pain, Mona went down the steps.

Lucy was awaiting her in the street, and they betook themselves to the nearest shop where they could get afternoon tea.

"Well," said Lucy, "what is your final judgment?"

Mona sighed. "Anatomy, very fair," she said—"morning paper especially; Physiology—between you and me and the lamp-post—the best paper I ever did in my life; Chemistry, safe, I think; Materia Medica—better at least than last time."

"*Brava!*" cried Lucy.

"Oh, don't! I ought not to have said so much. It is tempting the Fates."

"No matter. With a record like that you can afford to tempt the Fates. Oh, Mona, I do hope you have got the Physiology medal!" She raised her teacup. "Here's to Mona Maclean, Gold Medallist in Physiology!"

"No, no, no," said Mona. "My paper is not on those lines at all, and the Practical is still to come."

"And who is better prepared for that than you, with your private laboratory, and all the rest of it?"

"I have often told you that the best work of the world is rarely done with the best instruments."

Lucy groaned. "If three days' examination won't keep her from moralising," she said, "it may safely be predicted that nothing will. What a prospect!"

Mona wrote to Rachel that night, fixing the day and hour of her arrival at Borrowness some three weeks later; and the next day she went down to Bournemouth to visit some friends. Only a very unlikely chance could have taken Dudley to Bournemouth too, but Mona never saw a tall and lanky figure on the cliffs, without a sudden wild fancy that it might be he. There was a good deal of gladness in her agitation at these times, but she did not really want to see him there. No, no; let things take their course! Let it all come about quietly and naturally, at dear old Castle Maclean, in the second week of August!

She returned to town a few days before the Practical Examination, and found a letter from Rachel awaiting her.

"My dear Cousin,—I was very pleased to get your letter, telling me when you were coming to pay me a visit; but there has been a great change in my life since last I wrote you. You know I have never been the same being since you went away. That Miss Jenkins, that you thought so much of, did very well in the shop, and was good at figures, but she was not like one of my own folk. Then she was a U.P., and she had friends of her own that she always wanted to go to in the evening; and many's the time I've been so dull that if it hadn't been for Sally I believe I'd have gone clean daft. I wrote and told Mary Ann about it, and she wrote back saying, wouldn't I go and join her in America? Of course I never thought of such a thing, but I spoke to my friends about her writing, and a few days after I got a very good offer for the goodwill of the business. It really was like a leading, but I never thought of that at the time. Then, without waiting to hear from me, Mary Ann wrote again, begging me to come. There was word of a baby

coming, and naturally at such a time she took a longing for her own flesh and blood. She never was one of your independent ones. Then I began to think I would like to go, but I'd an awful dread of the sea and the strangeness. Well, would you believe it? four days ago, Mrs Anderson came in and told me her brother was sailing to America in about ten days, with all his family from Glasgow, and he would be very glad to look after me if I would take my passage by the same steamer. So that settled it somehow. It's a queer-like thing, after sitting still all one's life, to make such a move all in a minute; but there seems to be the hand of Providence in it all, and Mary Ann says some of their acquaintances are most genteel, and the minister of the Baptist Chapel preaches the word with power.

"So you see, my dear, I shall be sailing from Glasgow the very day you were meaning to come to me. I am all in an upturn, as you may think, with a sale in the house and what not; but if you would come a week sooner, I'd be very pleased to see you. If you could have been happy to stay with me, I never would have thought of all this; but I never could have gone on as I was doing, though it is a terrible trial to break off all the old ties.

"You must write to me often and tell me what you are doing, and whether there is any word of your settling down in life.

"Your affectionate Cousin,

"RACHEL SIMPSON.

"*P.S.*—Do you know of anything that is good for the sea-sickness?"

It was some time before Mona grasped the full consequences of this letter. She even allowed herself to wonder for a moment whether Mary Ann's difficulty in finding a lady-help had anything to do with this cordial invitation. But that fancy was soon crowded out of her mind by the formidable situation that had to be faced. No Rachel, no shop,—nothing more outside of herself to blush for; but, on the other

hand, no wind-swept coast, no Castle Maclean, no long-postponed explanation, no Dr Dudley! The truth came upon her with a force that was absolutely crushing.

"I might have known it," she said, looking out of the window, with white lips and unseeing eyes. "I was counting on it too much. It has been the pivot on which my whole life has turned."

Then a bright idea occurred to her. Auntie Bell had plenty of spare room in the farmhouse, and she was sure the dear old woman would be glad to have a visit from her at any time.

But, when she timidly suggested it, Auntie Bell wrote back in great distress to say that, after much persuasion, she had let her up-stairs rooms to an artist for August. She would be so proud and pleased if Mona would come to her in September.

But Mona had promised to join the Munros on the 15th of August.

There still remained the chance of the Practical Examination; but Mona knew by experience that the initials D. and M. came sufficiently far apart in the alphabet to make it very unlikely that the owners of them would be called up at the same time.

Nor were they. Neither at Burlington House, nor at the Embankment, did Mona see a trace of her friend. At the Practical Physiology examination, all the students were called up together, but Mona did not take the pass paper; she went in for honours the following day, and her first glance round the handful of enthusiasts assembled for six hours' unbroken work was sufficient to convince her that Dr Dudley was not there. In this subject at least he had evidently contented himself with a pass. In the bitterness of her disappointment, she cared little for the results of the examination, and so worked coolly with a steady hand. When she was called up for her *Viva* she vaguely felt that she was doing better than her best, but she did not care.

At last it was over—the examination which had once

seemed to be wellnigh the aim and end of existence; and now, though conscious of having done well, she threw herself on the hearth-rug, in a fit of depression that was almost maddening.

"Oh God," she groaned, "help me! I cannot bear it!"

CHAPTER L.

SUCCESS OR FAILURE?

Once more the lists were posted at the door of the university, and once more a group of eager faces had gathered round to read them. Presently a tall figure came swinging down the street, and, ignoring the Pass-list altogether, made straight for the Honours.

It was all right,—better than he had dared to hope.

ANATOMY.

First Class.

DUDLEY, RALPH, St Kunigonde's Hospital.
Exhibition and Gold Medal.

Ralph's heart gave a great leap of thanksgiving.

"Now," he said almost audibly, "I can go down to Borrowness, and ask Miss Maclean in so many words to be my wife."

As if the paper in front of him had heard the words, his eye caught the name Maclean below his own. He looked again. Yes, there was no imagination about it.

PHYSIOLOGY.

First Class.

MACLEAN, MONA, Lond. Sch. of Med. for Women.
Exhibition and Gold Medal.

Mona Maclean—*her* name was Margaret. She had told him so that day at Castle Maclean, and he had seen it in a well-worn prayer-book in Mr Ewing's church. But the coincidence was a curious one. He turned sharply round and touched a fellow-student on the arm.

"Who," he said hastily, "is Miss Mona Maclean?"

"Miss Maclean? Oh, she is one of their great dons at the Women's School. She took a First Class in Botany the year I passed my Prel. Sci."

Certainly it was only a coincidence. No doubt this woman was an out-and-out blue-stocking, in spite of her pretty name; and even in the matter of brains he did not believe she was a patch upon his princess.

He knew his old aunt would be delighted to hear of his success, but he would not telegraph, lest by any chance the news should leak round to Mona. He wanted to tell her himself. She had been so interested the day he had told her the story of his life. He had not concealed its failures, and he wanted to tell her with his own lips of this first little bit of success. For, after all, it was a success to be M'Diarmid's medallist. No man who had scamped his work could possibly hold such a position as that; and Miss Maclean was so quick, so sympathetic, she would see in a moment how much it meant. It seemed almost too good to be true, that this time to-morrow he would be sitting with her, alone on her storm-tossed battlements, free to talk of his love, and to draw her secret from half-willing lips—free to build all sorts of castles in the air, and to sketch the bold outline of a perfect future.

He looked at his watch, and wondered how he was to exist till eight o'clock, when the night express left for Edinburgh. He scarcely heard the congratulations that were heaped upon him by one and another of his friends, so eager was he to hear what she would say.

The examination was over now—well over. He was free for the first time to give the reins to his thoughts, and to follow whithersoever they beckoned; and a wild dance they

led him, over giddy heights that made his brain reel and his pulse leap high with infinite longing. The dusty streets might have been Elysian fields for all he knew; in so far as he saw outward things at all, he saw them through a rose-hued medium of love. Introspection was almost dead within him—almost, but not quite—enough remained to fill him with intensest gratitude that this complete abandonment should have come to him.

"Oh let the solid ground not fail beneath my feet,
Before my life has found what some have found so sweet!"

How often he had uttered those words, scarcely daring to hope that his prayer would be granted; and now he had found what he longed for, and surely no man before had ever found it so sweet.

"Holloa! cutting old friends already?" said a merry voice in his ear. "Some people are very quickly blinded by success."

"Why, Melville, what brings you here?"

"I was on my way to the university to find out how many medals you have got. Your face proclaims four at least."

"I am sorry it is so deceptive. I have only got one."

"Anatomy?"

"Anatomy."

"Played! Anything else?"

"No. A second class in chemistry."

"And that's nothing? We have grown very high and mighty all of a sudden. Who's got the medal in physiology?"

"A woman!"

"Name?"

"Miss—Maclean, I think;" and Dudley was amazed to find himself blushing.

"When do you go down?"

"To-night."

"That's right! But look here, dear boy. Take a word of advice with you. Keep out of the way of the *siren!*"

"You go to——!" Dudley stopped short, but his eyes flashed fire.

"It's a curious thing," he observed cynically, "how a man can go through half his life without learning to hold his tongue about his private affairs."

Melville raised his eyebrows, and whistled a few notes of a popular music-hall ditty.

For about a hundred yards the two walked on in silence. Then Ralph put his hand in his friend's arm.

"Don't talk to me about it, Jack," he said, "there's a good fellow, but I have been the most confounded snob that ever lived."

Nothing more was said till they parted at the street corner, and then Melville stood and watched his friend out of sight.

"Another good man gone wrong!" he observed philosophically; and, shrugging his shoulders, he made his way back to the hospital.

The long day and the interminable night were over.

"Even an Eastern Counties train
Must needs come in at last."

And Dudley did actually find himself alighting at the familiar little station on a bright August morning. Never before had his home seemed so attractive to him. The strong east wind was like wine, fleecy clouds chased each other across a brilliant blue sky, and the first mellow glow was just beginning to tinge the billowy acres of corn. The tall trees at the foot of his aunt's garden threw broken shadows across the quiet lawn. The beds were bright with old-fashioned flowers, and the house, with its pillared portico, rose, white and stately, beyond the sweep of the carriage-drive.

"Welcome home, doctor!" said the gatekeeper's wife, curtseying low as Ralph passed the lodge. "You're gey late this year. Jeames cam' through frae Edinbury a fortnight syne."

"I suppose so," said Ralph, smiling pleasantly; "how is he getting on?"

"Vera weel, I thank ye, sir! He's brocht a prize buik wi' him this time;" and the good woman's face beamed with triumph. To the great pride of his family, the gatekeeper's son was studying "to be a meenister."

Mrs Hamilton came out to the door to meet her nephew, and a pang shot through Ralph's heart as he saw how frail she looked.

"Why, I declare," he said, putting his arm round her affectionately, "my old lady has been missing her scapegrace."

"Conceited as ever," she said, returning his caress, but the rare tears stole into her eyes as she spoke.

"You dear old thing! why didn't you send for me? And Burns, too, promised to let me know."

"Nonsense, laddie! There's nothing wrong. I have never been ill. I am getting to be an old woman, that's all; and I'm not so fond of east winds as I once was. Run up-stairs while Dobson infuses the tea, and then come and tell me all about the examination."

The breakfast parlour was bright with flowers, and the table was laden with good things. The window stood open, and the bees hummed in and out in a flood of sunshine.

"Grouse already!" exclaimed Ralph.

"Yes; Lord Kirkhope and Sir Roderick have each sent a brace."

"What it is to live with the belle of the country-side, as they say in the story-books!"

"What it is to live with a spoilt and impertinent nephew! Very well done, Ralph! I have no patience with a man who does not know how to carve."

"Carving ought to come easy to the Gold Medallist in Anatomy, oughtn't it?" he said mischievously.

"Are you really that?"

"At your service."

"And you have not shown it to me yet!"

"Bless the old darling! I shall not see it myself till May. The object of the medal is to remind a man of the mountain of learning he has contrived to—forget!"

Mrs Hamilton laughed.

"How long a holiday can you take, Ralph?" she asked presently.

"A month. I ought to get back to hospital then, if you are—sick of my company."

"Oh, I'll be that, never fear! and I suppose you would have no objection to spending a few weeks with me up in the Highlands, when you get a little rested. It's not like me, but I've a great longing for a change."

"I daresay it would be a good plan," he answered very gravely; and, quick as she was, she did not guess the throb of dismay that shot through his heart.

"You do look tired, Ralph, in spite of yourself," she said a moment later. "Your room is all ready. Go and lie down for a few hours."

"No, no," he said restlessly. "I can't sleep during the day. Let us have a drive; and this afternoon, while you have your nap, I will go and smool on the beach. That rests me more than anything."

Smool! Oh Ralph!

He never doubted that he would find Mona at Castle Maclean. She went there so often, and now she must know well that any day might bring him, and that he would seek her there. He had rehearsed the meeting so often in his mind; and unconsciously he rehearsed it again this afternoon, as he strode down the little footpath that led through the fields to the sea. The tide was out. That was disappointing. Sunlit waves, rocking festoons of *Fucus* on their bosom, had always formed part of his mental picture; but now the great brown trails hung dry and motionless, from the burning rocks, in the strong afternoon sun.

Never mind! It was of no consequence after all. Two minutes hence, he and she would have little thought to spare

for the tide and the *Fucus*. Ralph quickened his steps and leapt up the side of the rock.

But Castle Maclean was empty.

"I need not have been in such a confounded hurry," he muttered irritably, as he looked at his watch. "Miss Simpson's mid-day dinner won't be over yet."

But two hours passed away, and no one came.

Miss Simpson's mid-day dinner must certainly be over now. Ralph was bitterly disappointed. Miss Maclean had always shown herself so much quicker, more perceptive, than he had dared to hope. Why did she fail him now, just when he had depended on her most? It took half the poetry out of their relationship, to think that she had not understood, that she had not counted on this meeting as he had.

He made up his mind to go home; but he overrated his own resolution; and in an incredibly short space of time, the bell of Miss Simpson's shop rang as he opened the door.

The shop was disappointing too. Everything was disappointing to-day! There was no lack of new goods, but they were displayed with a want of design and harmony that jarred on his over-strained nerves; and, to crown all, an "air with variations" was being very indifferently played on a cracked piano up-stairs. The music stopped at the sound of the bell, and a young woman came down-stairs.

"Genus *minx*, species *vulgaris*." A moment was sufficient to settle that question. Ralph was so taken aback that it did not even occur to him to ask for india-rubber.

"Is Miss Simpson in?" he said at last.

"Oh lor'! no, sir. Miss Simpson sailed for America nearly a week ago. My pa bought the business, and he means to conduct it on quite a different scale. What is the first thing I can show you to-day, sir?"

He tried to ask for Miss Maclean, but he could not bring her name over his lips; so, lifting his hat, he hastily left the shop.

He emptied his first glass of wine at dinner, before he ventured to broach the subject to his aunt.

"You did not tell me Miss Simpson had emigrated," he said suddenly.

"Miss Simpson! What Miss Simpson? Bless the boy! he's developing quite a taste for local gossip. I only heard it myself three or four days ago. It seems that niece—whom you thought such a genius, by the way—went to America some time ago, and now her aunt has gone to join her."

"*Nonsense!* I mean"—Ralph laughed rather nervously—"I can't conceive of any one sending across the Atlantic for old Simpson. And, besides—that—young lady—wasn't her niece at all, auntie mine. She was a distant cousin."

"I think you are mistaken, dear. The *young woman* told me herself she was Miss Simpson's niece, and I suppose she ought to know."

Dimly it occurred to Ralph that he and his aunt must be talking of two different people; but his mind was in such a whirl of bewilderment that reflection was impossible, and as soon as dinner was over, he escaped to his own room, on the true plea of a racking headache.

What had happened? Was it all a hideous nightmare, from which he would awake with infinite relief; or was some evil genius really turning his life upside down? What an infernal idiot he had been not to speak out plainly six months ago! And to think that he had waited only for this examination,—this trumpery bit of child's-play! Perhaps she had expected him to write, perhaps she had gone to America in despair; at all events, she had vanished out of his life like the heroine of a fairy tale, and he had not the vaguest notion where to look for her.

Then saner thoughts began to take form in his mind. He was living, after all, in the latter part of the nineteenth century. People could not vanish now-a-days and leave no trace. There must be many in Borrowness who could tell him where she was.

Yes; but who were they? He knew few people in the place, and he could not go round from door to door making enquiries.

At last, with a rush of thankfulness, he bethought himself of Mr Stuart and Matilda Cookson. Both of them were sure to know where Miss Maclean had gone. He looked at his watch—yes, it was past his aunt's bedtime, and not too late to drop in on Stuart. He told the servants not to sit up if he should be late, and then he walked along the highroad to Kirkstoun, at a pace few men could have equalled.

Once more disappointment awaited him. Mr Stuart was away for a month's holiday, and the manse was occupied by his "supply." Dudley was certainly not intimate enough with the Cooksons to pay them a visit at this hour; so he was forced, sorely against his will, to postpone his enquiries until the next day.

"I suppose the Cooksons will be away for August too," he said to himself many times during that restless night; but Fortune favoured him at last. When he opened the garden-gate next day, he found Matilda and her father on the lawn.

"Come away, doctor!" cried Mr Cookson heartily. "I have got some cigars here that you won't get a chance to smoke every day of your life. Come and tell us your news!"

Fully half an hour passed before Dudley contrived to bring the conversation round to Rachel Simpson's departure.

"And has Miss Maclean gone to America too?" he said indifferently, with his eyes fixed on the curling wreaths of tobacco-smoke.

"Oh, bless my soul, no!" cried Mr Cookson, slapping his visitor on the knee. "Did you never hear that story? It was excellent,—excellent! Where do you think I saw Miss Maclean last? Driving in Hyde Park in as elegant a carriage as ever I wish to see. There was another lady with her—leaning back, you know, with their lace and their parasols,"—Mr Cookson attempted somewhat unsuccessfully to demonstrate the attitude of the ladies in question,—"and a young man riding alongside. A tip-top turn-out altogether, I warrant you."

Dudley's face darkened, but he waited for his host to go on.

"I had got wind of it before she left us," Mr Cookson continued complacently, "from something Colonel Lawrence let drop, and we had her here to dinner; a fine girl, a fine girl! I remember when I was a boy hearing what a successful man her grandfather was; but her people had been out of the place so long, one never thought of one of them coming back. Matilda knew about it all along, it seems; and she and Miss Maclean were fast friends, but she kept it very close."

"I found it out by accident," Matilda said with dignity; "but no one with any perception could see Miss Maclean and question that she was a lady."

"I quite agree with you," Dudley said gravely; "but did Miss Maclean confide to you what induced her to come masquerading down here?"

He regretted the words the moment they were spoken, but it was too late to recall them.

Matilda's face flushed.

"If you knew Miss Maclean at all," she said, "you would be ashamed to say that. She was not always wondering what people would think of somebody's cousin, or somebody else's niece; she was her very own self. The fact that she had grand relations did not make Miss Simpson any the less her cousin. It was as easy to Miss Maclean to claim kindred with a vulgar woman in a shop as with a fine lady in a ball-room."

This was hyperbolical, no doubt; but as Dudley listened to it, he wondered whether Mona could safely be judged by the influence she had had on Matilda Cookson.

One question more he had to ask. "Is she a medical student?"

"Bless my soul, no!" laughed Mr Cookson. "She has no need to do anything for herself. In a small way she is an heiress."

This was rash; but, after acting the part of the one who knows, Mr Cookson was unwilling to own his ignorance;

and, his idea of medical women being vague and alarming in the extreme, it never crossed his mind that an attractive, well-to-do young lady like Miss Maclean could possibly belong to their ranks.

Ralph turned to Matilda.

"Do you know where Miss Maclean is now?" he said. "In London?"

"I had a letter from her yesterday," Matilda answered proudly, drawing an oft-perused document from her pocket. "She is just starting with a party of friends to travel in Switzerland."

"What a magnificent araucaria that is!" Dudley said suddenly.

"It would need be," replied Mr Cookson. "It cost me a pretty penny, I can tell you."

Then Dudley rose to go. His manner was playful, but his heart was welling over with bitterness. He did not realise the position in which he had placed the woman he loved; it did not occur to him to think how much worse it would have been if she had run after him, instead of appearing to run away. He could not believe that she was false, and yet—*how* she had deceived him! What madness it was ever to trust to the honesty of a woman's eyes!

"Well, old boy!" he said to himself cynically, as he walked back to Carlton Lodge, "are we going to write our Sorrows of Werther' *once again?*"

CHAPTER LI.

ANOTHER CHAT BY THE FIRE.

The last sodden leaves had fallen from the London trees, and autumn was fast merging into winter. Mona sat alone in her study, deep in a copy of *Balfour On the Heart*, which

she had picked up second-hand, on her way from hospital, and had carried home in triumph. It was the height of her ambition at this time to be "strong on the heart and lungs"; and as she read she mechanically percussed the arm of her big chair, with a lightness of touch which many doctors might have envied.

There was a knock at the door, and Miss Lascelles entered the room.

"That's right," said Mona, holding out her hand, "sit down."

"Thanks," was the reply, in Miss Lascelles's cultured, musical drawl. "I am not going to stay. I came to ask if you would lend me your notes of that leucocythæmia case. I am working up the spleen just now."

"I will, with pleasure. But don't be in such a hurry, now that you have come so far. I never get a chance to speak to you in hospital. Sit down and tell me what the scientist thinks of it all."

Miss Lascelles pulled off her hat unceremoniously, and passed her hand through her dark hair.

"Oh, reform it altogether!" she cried. "There is a deal of humbug in the profession, and I don't know that the women have lessened it."

Mona laughed.

"What a born reformer you are!" she said admiringly.

"I suppose I am. In other words, I shall never be a successful doctor. *Kismet!* I don't see how any honest man can live in this world and not be a reformer."

"Don't you? Oh, I do."

Miss Lascelles glanced round the pretty room.

"I almost envy you," she said. "It must be very pleasant to be able to shut one's eyes to abuses, and eat one's pudding in comfort."

"Ay, or to shut one's eyes to one's father's shortcomings, and make the best of them."

"It is not the shortcomings I object to, it is the false pre-

tensions. Give me honesty at all costs. Let everything be open and above-board."

"Honesty—honesty—honesty!" said Mona. "I sometimes think I hate honesty; it is so often another name for ingratitude and brutality. I care more for loyalty than for all the other virtues put together. It is the loyal souls who prepare the way for the reformer. His actual work is often nothing more than the magnificent thrust with which a child knocks down a castle of cards."

"I believe in loyalty, too; but let us be loyal to the right, not loyal to the wrong."

"With all my heart, if you can contrive to separate the right from the wrong. I never could. I am always brought back to that grand bold line—

'Mit ihm zu irren ist dir Gewinn.'

You don't believe that?"

Miss Lascelles laughed, and shook her head. "I don't mean to go astray with anybody, if I can help it. I had no idea, Miss Maclean, that you were so desperately—*mediæval*."

Mona smiled.

"I think it is rather Greek than mediæval to shut one's eyes to abuses, and eat one's pudding in comfort. The mediæval spirit renounces the pudding, and looks beyond the abuses."

Miss Lascelles sprang to her feet, and carelessly threw on her broad picturesque hat.

"I am neither Greek nor mediæval, then," she said, involuntarily drawing up the sleeves from her plump pretty wrists as she spoke; "for I choose to share my pudding, and wage war to the death against the abuses."

"*Brava!*" said Mona. "You are one of the sort that live in history."

"For knocking down a castle of cards?"

"Nay, nay; I did not say that of all reformers."

"Well, Miss Maclean, whatever your theories may be, you have worked a grand reformation in Miss Reynolds."

"Now that is precisely a case of the wrong man getting the credit. That, at least, was the work of her own loyal self."

"If only she would be quite natural, and not treat the doctors with that half-coquettish air!"

"But that is natural to her, and I can't say I altogether object to it. Perhaps I am partial. Here are the notes in the meantime."

"Many thanks. Good-bye."

"*Au revoir!* Come back again—when you want another chapter out of the *Middle Ages*."

Mona returned to her books, but she had not read a page before another visitor was announced.

"I really shall have to sport my oak," she said; but when she took the card from the salver, her whole face beamed.

"Show him in," she said, wheeling an arm-chair up to the fire. "Mr Reynolds, there are not three people in the world whom I should be so glad to see. What lucky wind blows you here now?"

"I have come partly to look after my two daughters," said the old man, smiling. "Let me have a good look at this one. Lucy tells me you are working yourself to death."

"One of Lucy's effective statements." But Mona flushed rather nervously under his steady gaze. "I suppose you have just come from her now."

"Yes."

"*She* is working splendidly if you will."

"So I gather." He smiled. "She is very indignant to-night about the rudeness of the doctor under whom she is working at hospital."

"I don't think it is very serious. They are excellent friends in the main, and you cannot expect all men to be gentlemen. The fact is"—Mona drew down her brows in earnest consideration—"we women are excellent, really excellent, at taking a good hard blow when we are convinced that we deserve it. That is where our metal comes in. But if we really mean to share men's work, we have got to

learn within the next generation to take a little miscellaneous knocking about from our superiors, without enquiring too closely whether we have deserved it or not. That is where our ignorance of the world comes in."

"I should think that was extremely true," Mr Reynolds said reflectively, "especially in a busy life like a doctor's, where there is so little time for explanations. There must be a good deal of give and take. But, my dear girl, don't let your common-sense run away with one atom of your womanliness. One would not think it necessary to say so, if one had not been disappointed in that respect, once and again."

"I know," Mona answered hurriedly. "It is a case of Scylla and Charybdis. We don't want to be mawkish and sentimental, and in the first swing of reaction we are apt to go to the other extreme and treat the patients in hospital as mere material. But you know, Mr Reynolds, if one realises that the occupant of each bed is a human soul, with its own rights and its own reserves—if one takes the trouble to knock at the door, in fact, and ask admission instead of leaping over the wall—life becomes pretty intense; a good deal gets crowded into a very few hours."

"I know. That is quite true. But all things become easier by practice. It may be the view of a half-informed outsider, but I cannot help thinking that, if you take the trouble, when you first begin ward-work, as Lucy calls it, to gain admission with the will of the patient, you will in time become the possessor of a magic *passe-partout*, which will make entrance not only infinitely more satisfactory and complete, but also even easier than by leaping over the wall."

"You should preach a sermon to women-doctors," Mona said, smiling; "and have it printed. I would lay it to heart for one."

"You will do far more good by preaching it yourself in your daily life, as indeed I believe you are doing now. But in any case, I did not come here to preach to you."

"You don't know how much I stand in need of it."

"I want you to talk to me. Do you know it is more than a year since I saw you?"

Mona sighed. "It seems five to me sometimes."

"I suppose it has been very full of events?"

Mr Reynolds had not forgotten the man whose presence at Borrowness made "all the difference" in Mona's life there.

"Yes. There was first my life with my cousin; and then the examination; and then Switzerland with the Munros; and then hospital. Four different Mona Macleans,—each living as hard as ever she could."

"And enjoying life?"

"I don't know. I have been so restless, so unsettled."

"I fancied I could read that in your face, but it is passing over now."

"I hope so. I don't know. Don't let us talk of it."

"You enjoy your hospital work?"

Mona was sitting opposite him on the corner of the tiled fender. She looked into the fire now, with an amount of expression in her face that was almost painful.

"Hospital," she said, "is—*salvation!* All one's work apart from that tends to make one self-centred. It is a duty to think much of *my* knowledge, *my* marks, *my* success, *my* failure. Hospital work gives one a chance to 'die to live.'"

She laughed softly.

"It must seem incredible to you, but I actually thought once that I had died to live,—I, with my books and my pictures, and my pretty gowns, and my countless toys! I thought I held them with so light a hand, that I valued them only for the eternal that was in them."

She paused and went on without much logical sequence. "It is so easy to die to live, when the life one dies to is something vague and shadowy and unknown; but let one brilliant ray of promised happiness cross one's path, and then it becomes a very different thing to die to that—to nothing abstract, nothing vague, but just to *that!* One realises what one's professions are worth.

"All the time I was at Borrowness I hardly once said a cross word to my cousin, and I suppose I took great credit to myself for that; but I see now that there was no true selflessness in it at all. It was simply because she was *so* unlike me that she never came into my real life. I conquered my hardships in a sense, by escaping them. I thought I had attained, and I have only learned now that I have attained nothing. The whole lesson of self-renunciation has still got to be learned."

"You are thinking much of the duty of self-renunciation; what of the duty of self-realisation?"

"Is there such a duty?"

"You have acted instinctively up till now on the theory that there is. Have you any reason to distrust your instincts?"

"I don't know. I seem to have got into a muddle about everything. How can they both be duties when they are so absolutely incompatible?"

"One can only unite them certainly by seeking for a higher truth that combines them both. It may seem a strange thing for a Christian minister to say, but it has always seemed to me that those words, 'die to live,' were an admirable expression of a philosophy, but a very poor maxim for daily life; partly because they ignore that duty of self-realisation, in which I for one believe, and partly because, so long as a man says, 'Am I dying to live?' he cannot possibly do it. The maxim accentuates the very element we want to get rid of. If we are indeed to die to live, we must cease to think about it; we must cease to know whether we live or die."

"But the higher truth, Mr Reynolds, what is that?"

"Nay, I should be doing you a poor service by telling you."

"There is only one higher truth conceivable," Mona said boldly, "and that is—God in all."

"And is not that enough? God in me. God to have His way in me, and to find the fullest possible expression

there. God in all men—in the church, the ball-room, the slum. If we see all things through the medium of God, what becomes of the strife between self-renunciation and self-realisation?"

Mona pressed his hand in silence. "You knew all that before, dear child," he said; "you had only got confused for the moment."

Mona shook her head. "I knew it vaguely," she said, "but you must not think I am living up to that level. I thought, in my infinite conceit, that I had risen above happiness and attained to blessedness; and now—and now—I want the happiness too."

He laid his hand on her shoulder. "And so you are wearing yourself out at hospital," he said quietly, as though that were the natural outcome of what she had said; "but don't forget the friends who love you, and who are depending on you."

Mona looked up gratefully into his face. The advice was almost the same as that which she herself had given to Lucy some months before; but the value of advice is rarely intrinsic—we think far less of its substance than we do of the personality of the giver. The words that are empty platitudes on the lips of one man, become living inspiration on those of another.

To-night, however, even Mr Reynolds had not the power to raise Mona above the longing for happiness. As the months went on, the strain of uncertainty was becoming almost unendurable. Never, since that night when he drove her home in his gig from Colonel Lawrence's Wood, had she heard anything from Dr Dudley; never, since the chance glimpses at Burlington House, had she even seen him. It seemed incredible that he could have failed to find her, if he had really tried; and yet—and yet——

"Oh, my friend, my friend!" she said wearily, "I have waited so long. *Where are you?*"

CHAPTER LII.

OLD FRIENDS.

"You are late," said Lady Munro. "Had you forgotten that you were going to take us to the theatre?"

She was sitting alone in the firelight, one dainty slippered foot on the burnished fender.

Sir Douglas looked sharply round the room without replying. "Is Mona here?" he said.

"No; she could not spare enough time to come to dinner. We are to call for her."

Sir Douglas frowned.

"That's always the way. Upon my soul, for all we see of her, she might as well be at—Borrowness!"

"Where in the world is that?" asked Lady Munro languidly. Then, with a sudden change of tone, "I have got such a piece of news for you," she said. "Another of our friends is engaged to be married."

"Not Dickinson?" he said, glancing at the foreign letter in her hand.

"Yes; the Indian mail came in to-day. Guess who the lady is?"

"You know I hate guessing. Go on!"

"Miss Colquhoun!"

"What an extraordinary thing!"

"Isn't it? It seems he wanted the thing settled before he sailed, but it took the exchange of a few letters to decide the question. I must say it is a great disappointment to me. I am quite sure the Sahib cared for Mona, and I did think she would take pity on him in the long-run."

"How ridiculous!" said Sir Douglas testily.

He wanted Mona to marry, because that was the natural and fitting destiny for a young and attractive woman; but it was quite another thing to think of her as the wife of any given man.

"Of course we all know that Mona ought to marry a duke," said Evelyn quietly. She had entered the room a moment before, looking very fair and sweet in her white evening dress. "But even if the duke could be brought to see it, which is not absolutely certain,—I suppose even dukes are sometimes blind to their best interests—oh, father, *don't!*"

For Sir Douglas was pinching her ear unmercifully.

"You little sauce-box!" he said indignantly, but he did not look displeased. Evelyn had learned that approaching womanhood gave her the right to take liberties with her father which his wife would scarcely have ventured upon.

"Well, whatever may be the cause of it," said Lady Munro, "Mona is not half so bright as she was a year ago."

Evelyn laughed.

"Do you remember what Sydney Smith said? 'Macaulay has improved of late,—flashes of silence!' Lucy told her yesterday that, to our great surprise, we find we may open our lips now-a-days, without having our heads snapped off with an epigram."

"It's all nonsense," said Sir Douglas loftily. "Mona is not changed a bit. You did not understand her, that is all."

But in truth no one had wondered over the change in Mona so much as he. He was perfectly certain that she did not care for the Sahib, and he had come at last to the conclusion that, with a girl like Mona, incessant hospital work was quite sufficient to account for the alteration. To his partial mind Mona's increased womanliness more than made up for her loss of sparkle. When friendship and affection are removed alike from all danger of starvation and of satiety, they are very hard to kill.

At this moment Nubboo announced dinner, and an hour or so later the carriage stopped at the door of Mona's rooms in Gower Street.

Much as Sir Douglas spoiled his niece, she "knew her place," as Lucy expressed it, better than to keep him wait-

ing; and the reverberations of the knocker had not died away when she appeared.

Sir Douglas ran his eye with satisfaction over the details of her toilet. It was an excellent thing for her, in this time of hard work and heart-hunger, that she felt the bounden necessity of living up to the level of Sir Douglas's expectations. She cared intensely for his approbation; partly for her own sake, partly because to him she represented the whole race of "learned women"; and she could not well have had a more friendly, frank, and fastidious critic.

The theatre was crowded when they entered their box. Like many habitual theatre-goers Sir Douglas hated boxes, but he had applied for seats too late to get anything else. It was the first night of a new melodrama,—new in actual date, but in all essentials old as the history of man. A noble magnificent hero; a sweet loyal wife; a long period of persecution, separation, and mutual devotion; a happy and triumphant reunion.

Judged by every canon of modern realistic art, it was stagey and conventional to the point of being ridiculous; but the acting was brilliant, and even Sir Douglas and Mona found it difficult to escape the enthusiasm of that crowded house. Evelyn and her mother were moved almost to tears before the end. The one saw in the play the ideal that lay in the shadows before her, the other the ideal that her own life had missed.

"Have you heard the news about the Sahib?" Lady Munro enquired in the pause that followed the first act.

"Yes," said Mona, flushing slightly; "I had a few lines from him by to-day's mail."

"Do you think the match a desirable one?"

"Ideal, so far as one can foresee. They won't water down each other's enthusiasms, as most married people do."

"Douglas remembers Miss Colquhoun as a quaint, old-fashioned child—not at all pretty. I suppose she has improved?"

"I suppose she has," Mona answered reflectively; "she is certainly immensely admired now."

"It was such an odd coincidence; we heard this morning of the engagement of another of our friends—Colonel Monteith's son; I forget whether you have met him?"

"No; I have met the Colonel. Who is the son engaged to?"

"Nobody very great. A Miss Nash, a girl with plenty of money. George inherits a nice little estate from his uncle, and he had to marry something to keep it up on. By the way, Lucy Reynolds must have mentioned him to you. She saw a good deal of him at Cannes." And Lady Munro looked somewhat anxiously at her niece.

"I rather think she did," Mona answered, pretending to stifle a yawn. "But Lucy met so many people while she was with you——"

The rise of the curtain for the second act obviated the necessity of finishing the sentence, and Lady Munro did not resume the subject.

As soon as Sir Douglas had left the box for the second time, it was entered by a stout man, with a vast expanse of shirt front, and a bunch of showy seals.

"I thought I could not be mistaken," he said with a marked Scotch accent, holding out his hand to Mona. "I have been watching you from the dress circle ever since the beginning of the play, Miss Maclean; and I thought I must just come and pay my respects."

Lady Munro looked utterly aghast, and the ease of Mona's manner rather belied her feelings, as she took his outstretched hand.

"That was very kind of you," she said simply. "Mr Cookson, my aunt, Lady Munro,—Miss Munro."

Mr Cookson gasped, and there was an awkward pause. Rachel Simpson had not taken with her, across the Atlantic, all the complications in her cousin's life.

Fortunately, at this moment two young men came in, and Mona was able to keep Mr Cookson pretty much to herself.

"I hope you are all well at Borrowness," she said cordially.

"Thanks, we are wonderful, considering. It'll be great news for Matilda that I came across you."

"Please give her my love."

There was another pause. Mona was longing to ask about Mrs Hamilton and Dr Dudley, but she did not dare.

"It was a great thing for Matilda getting to know you," Mr Cookson went on. "We often wish you were back among us. If ever you care to renew the homely old associations a bit, our spare room is always at your disposal, you know."

Care to renew the old associations! What else in life did she care so much about? In her eagerness she forgot even the presence of her aunt.

"I should like very much to see the old place again," she said. "You are very kind."

Mr Cookson's good-natured face beamed with delighted surprise.

"It isn't looking its best now," he said; "but any time you care to come, we shall be only too delighted."

"Thank you. If it would not be too much trouble to Mrs Cookson, I could come for a day or two at the beginning of January. I shall never forget the fairy frost we had at that time last winter."

Mr Cookson laughed.

"We will be proud to see you at any time," he said; "but I am afraid we have not enough interest with the clerk of the weather to get up a frost like that again. I never remember to have seen the like of it."

He turned to Lady Munro with a vague idea that he ought to be making himself agreeable to her.

"My girls were wishing they could carry the leaves and things home," he said; "it seemed such a waste like."

Mona inwardly blessed her aunt for the gracious smile with which she listened to these words; but, whatever Lady Munro's feelings might be, it was extremely difficult for her to be ungracious to any one.

"I think you did," she said frankly; "but you see, Uncle Douglas, I promised to go at a time when I only knew you by name, and I had not the least idea then that you would be so kind to me. I felt bound to keep my word, and I did not feel quite sure that you would approve of it."

"*Approve of it!*" he exclaimed indignantly.

"But I always meant to tell you about it sooner or later."

Mona sighed. She had expected the whole story to come out in connection with her engagement to Dr Dudley. And now that engagement seemed to be becoming more and more problematical.

"Particularly later," said Sir Douglas sarcastically. "It is nearly a year now since you left."

"Yes; but that isn't exactly due to intentional secrecy on my part. The fact is, my visit has some painful associations for me now."

"So I should think," he said. "Is it really true, Mona, that you stood behind a counter?—that you *kept a shop?*"

"Perfectly true," said Mona, meeting his gaze without flinching. "I confess I had no special training for the work, but I did not do it so badly, after all."

The least suspicion of a smile played about the corners of his mouth, but he suppressed it instantly.

"And when," he asked, "may we expect your next attack of shopkeeping?"

"Oh, did Colonel Lawrence not tell you? My cousin sailed for America months ago."

He looked relieved.

"To your infinite regret, no doubt."

"I am afraid it is a great weight off my mind."

"And is that the end of the affair, or have you any more cousins down there?"

"I have one or two friends; no relatives."

"Then there is nothing to take you back again?"

Poor Mona!

"I met a Borrowness acquaintance in the theatre to-night," she said, "and promised to go down for a day or two

at Christmas. Uncle Douglas, you did not ask to see my genealogical tree before you took me to Norway. I am proud of the fact that my grandfather rose from the ranks; and, even if I were not, I could not consent to draw all my acquaintances from one set. There are four links in the chain—your world, you, me, my world. Your world won't let you go, and I can't let my world go. If you must break the chain, you can only do it in one place."

"I don't believe you would care a straw if I did."

"I should care intensely," said Mona, her eyes filling with tears. "It seems like a fairy tale that a brilliant man of the world like you should be so good to commonplace me; and, besides—you know I love you almost as if you were my father. But, indeed, now that I know you and Aunt Maud, you may trust me in future always to think of what is due to you."

She had risen from her chair as she spoke, and he strode across the hearth-rug and kissed her affectionately.

"There, there," he said, "she shall dictate her own terms! Thank heaven at least that that old frump is well across the Atlantic!"

He went away, and Mona was left alone, to think over the events of the day. Doris and the Sahib, Monteith and Lucy,—it was the old tale over again,—"The one shall be taken, and the other left." How strange it seemed that life should run smoothly for Doris, with all her grand power of self-surrender; and that poor little Lucy, with her innocent, childlike expectation of happiness, should be called upon to suffer!

"——so horribly," Mona added; but in her heart she was beginning to hope that Lucy had not been so hard hit after all.

And for herself, how did the equation run? As the Sahib is to Doris, so is somebody to me? or, as Monteith is to Lucy, so is somebody to me? No, no, no! That was impossible. Monteith had never treated Lucy as Dr Dudley had treated her.

During all these months what had caused Mona the acutest suffering was an anguish of shame. It never remained with her long, but it recurred whenever she was worn out and depressed. She had long since realised that, from an outsider's point of view, her experience that winter night was in no way so exceptional as she had supposed,—that there were thousands of men who would give such expression to a moment's transient passion. But surely, surely Dr Dudley was not one of these, and surely any man must see that with a woman like her it must be everything or nothing! If he had indeed torn her soul out and given her nothing in return, why then—then—— But she never could finish the sentence, for the recollection of a hundred words and actions and looks came back, and turned the gall into sweetness. And she always ended with the same old cry—"If only I had told him about my life, if only I had given him no shadow of a reason to think that I had deceived him!"

But to-night it seemed as if the long uncertainty must be coming to an end at last. If she went to Borrowness at Christmas, as she had promised, she could not fail to hear something of her friend, and she might even see him.

CHAPTER LIII.

WAITING.

The weeks passed very slowly till the Christmas holidays came round; but, on the whole, life had become more bearable for Mona. The future was as uncertain as ever, but she had at least one definite event to look forward to. There was a light of some kind before her, though it might be only a Will-o'-the-wisp.

And a Will-o'-the-wisp it was destined to prove.

She arrived at Borrowness late in the evening, and immediately after breakfast next morning, Matilda begged her to come to Castle Maclean. Mona assented the more readily, as the walk led them past the gates of Carlton Lodge; but at the first glance she saw that the house was shut up.

It was some minutes before she could measure the full force of the blow.

"What has become of Mrs Hamilton?" she said at last, with averted face.

"Oh, didn't you know? She was awfully ill last autumn. Dr Dudley had some great gun down from London to see her,—as if Edinburgh doctors were not a great deal *better!* —and she was ordered abroad for the winter. Dr Dudley took her away at once, to Cairo, or Algiers, or some *such* place. We don't hear anything about them now. By the way, Miss Maclean, the very last time that I saw Dr Dudley he was asking about you."

Mona could not trust herself to speak.

"He wanted to know if you had gone to America with Miss Simpson, and Pa gave him a glowing account of how he had seen you in London."

"At the theatre?"

"No, no. Pa saw you once, long before that, one day in Hyde Park, with a lady—and a young gentleman. I thought it would be Lady Munro, but I never said *so* to Pa."

It was contrary to all Mona's instincts to ask what any one had said of her, but the opportunity was too precious to be lost. Her dignity must go.

"And what did Dr Dudley say to that?" she asked, as carelessly as she could.

Matilda hesitated; but she felt a pardonable longing to repeat her own brave words.

"I don't know whether I ought to tell you," she said. "You see—Dr Dudley doesn't know you as well as I do.

He said in that horrid sneering way of his, 'And do you know what induced her to come masquerading down here?' I gave him a piece of my mind, I can tell you." And Matilda repeated the retort which she had so often gone over with keen satisfaction in her own mind.

"You loyal little soul!" said Mona; but her face had turned very white.

"Dr Dudley asked such an extraordinary thing," Matilda went on. "He wanted to know whether you were—a *medical student!*"

Ah! so he had noticed her name in the lists. Then why had he not written to her at the School?

"Fancy his imagining such a thing! Pa told him you had no need to do anything for yourself."

Mona was too preoccupied to think of it at the time; but, before she left Borrowness, she broke to the Cooksons the astounding fact that, although she had no need to do anything for herself, she *was* a medical student.

When she came to think calmly over the incident which Matilda had narrated to her, she did not know whether to draw from it comfort or despair. She was not sorry that Dudley should have been angry,—angry enough to forget himself before little Matilda Cookson; but had he been content to condemn her unheard? Surely he could in some way have got a letter to her. Algiers and Cairo were far off, but they were not on the astral plane.

No, certainly Mona did not despair of her friend. It might have been better for her physically if she had. If she had been sure that he had forgotten her, she would have turned the key with a will on the suite of enchanted rooms; but the suspense, the excitement of uncertainty, was wearing out her strength.

When spring came round she was thoroughly ill. She went about her work as usual, but even her lecturers and fellow-students saw that something was wrong; and Sir Douglas implored her to give up medicine altogether.

"I ought to have trusted my own instincts," he said.

"The very first day I saw your face, I felt sure that you were not the sort to make a doctor. That kind of work wants women of coarser fibre. There is no use trying to chop wood with a razor."

In vain Mona protested that medical work had nothing to do with it; that she could not live without her hospital. She was not prepared to suggest any other explanation, and Sir Douglas stuck to his point.

"Don't fret, dear," she said at last. "If you like, I will go and see Dr Alice Bateson to-morrow."

"*Do!*" he said emphatically. "I have a great mind to go and see her myself."

So next evening Mona found herself in a pleasant, airy consulting-room. Dr Bateson rose as her patient entered, and looked at her steadily, with the penetrating brown eyes.

"I am not ill," Mona said apologetically. "But I can't sleep much, and things get on my nerves; so I thought I would allow myself the luxury of consulting you."

"You do look seedy," was the frank reply, and the brown eyes kept firm hold of the white, sensitive face. "Overworking?"

"No."

"When is your next examination?"

"Not for eighteen months."

"So it isn't that?"

"No, it isn't that."

Dr Bateson put her fingers on the girl's pulse. Her manner could not be called strictly sympathetic—certainly not effusive—but there was something very irresistible in her profound and unassumed interest in her patients.

"Is something particular worrying you?" she said shortly.

Mona smiled drearily.

"There you have me," she said. "Something is worrying me. It lies entirely out of my power, so I cannot control it; and it is still uncertain, so I cannot make up my mind to it."

"And you can't shake it off, and wait?"

"I am afraid it is because I have failed in that, that I have come to you. I suppose I am demanding the impossible—asking you to 'minister to a mind diseased.'"

"I don't mind ministering to a mind diseased at all—if it is not too diseased to carry out my instructions. In this age of worry and strain one laughs at the stories of the old doctors, who declined to undertake a case if the patient had anything on his mind. They would not have a very flourishing practice now-a-days. Thousands of worries and not a few suicides might be prevented by the timely use of a simple tonic. Prosaic, isn't it?"

"Prove it true in my case, and I shall be grateful to you all my life. I don't play the part of invalid *con amore*."

"That I believe. What are you going to do with your Easter holiday?"

"I am not going to leave town,—at least not for more than a few days."

"Why not?"

Mona's appearance did not suggest the lack of means, to which Dr Alice Bateson was pretty well accustomed in her practice.

"I want to get on with my hospital work; and besides, it is work that keeps one sane."

"That is quite true up to a certain point. I suppose you have friends that you can go to?"

"Yes. My aunt wants me to go to Bournemouth with her," Mona admitted unwillingly.

"And is she a congenial companion?"

"Thoroughly; but I should mope myself to death."

"Not if you follow my advice. Live on the cliffs the whole day long, read what will rest you, and take a tonic that will make you eat in spite of yourself."

She asked a few more questions, and then consulted Mona very frankly about the ingredients of her prescription. Dr Bateson did not at all believe in making a mystery of her

art, nor in drawing a hard-and-fast line between students and doctors.

"Thank you very much indeed," Mona said, rising and tendering her fee.

"Nonsense! we are none of us cannibals, as your great Scotch Æsculapius says. I don't take fees from students and nurses."

"But I am not studying in order to support myself."

"I can't help that. Now I wonder if you mean to take my advice as well as my tonic?" She asked the question quite dispassionately, as if it only interested her in an abstract way.

"If you don't accept a fee," Mona said, in an injured tone, "you bind me over to take your advice."

"Ah! if that's the case, I wish I could afford to refuse fees from all my patients. Good-bye. Send me a line from Bournemouth to tell me how you get on. I wish I could be of more use to you!" And for the first time a look of very genuine sympathy shot from the honest brown eyes.

"Well?" said Sir Douglas, when he saw Mona next day.

"Dr Bateson says I am to go to Bournemouth with Aunt Maud."

"Nonsense! Did she really?"

Warmly as Sir Douglas approved of women-doctors, it was a source of great surprise to him that they should recommend anything sensible.

And so it came to pass that Mona began by degrees to pick up fresh health and strength in spite of everything. She could not shake off her worry; but day by day, to her own surprise, it weighed on her more bearably.

One morning near the end of April she took up a copy of the *Times*, and her eye fell on the following notice—"On the 23d inst., at Carlton Lodge, Borrowness, Eleanor Jane, relict of the late George Hamilton, Esq., J.P. and D.L. of the County, in her 79th year."

"So she came home to die," Mona thought; "and now—

now I suppose he will come up to London and go on with his work. I wonder if he will present himself at Burlington House for his medal next month? For, if he does, I shall see him."

And it was well that Presentation Day was so near, or Dr Bateson might have been disappointed, after all, in the results of her prescription.

CHAPTER LIV.

PRESENTATION DAY.

The eventful day dawned at last, clear and bright, with a summer sky and a fresh spring breeze.

"One would think I was a bride at the very least," Mona said, laughing, when Lucy and Evelyn came in to help her to dress.

"If you think we would take this amount of trouble for a common or garden bride," said Lucy loftily, "you are profoundly mistaken. Bride, indeed!"

Sir Douglas had insisted on giving Mona an undergraduate's gown, heavy and handsome as it could be made; and the sight of her in that, and in a most becoming trencher, did more to reconcile him to her study of medicine than any amount of argument could have done.

"Distinctly striking!" was Mona's comment, when Lucy and Evelyn stopped dancing round her, and allowed her to see herself in the pier-glass. And she was perfectly right. Never in all her bright young life had she looked so charming as she did that Presentation Day.

"You will go to the function to-day, Ralph?" said Melville to his friend the same morning.

"Not I! God bless my soul! when a man has graduated at Edinburgh and Cambridge, he can afford to dispense with a twopenny-halfpenny function at Burlington House."

"I thought you admitted that, even in comparison with Cambridge and Edinburgh, London had its points?"

"So I do. But the graduation ceremony is not one of them. Ceremonial does not sprout kindly on nineteenth-century soil. One misses the tradition, the aroma of faith, the grand roll of the *In nomine Patris*. Call it superstition, humbug, what you will, but materialism is confoundedly inartistic."

"Spoken like a book with pictures. But without entering fully into the question of Atheism *versus* Christianity, the point at issue is briefly this: I have got a ticket for the affair, for the first time in my life, and I want to applaud somebody I know. Sweet girl-graduates are all very well, but I decline to waste all my adolescent enthusiasm on a physiologist in petticoats."

"By the way, a woman did get the Physiology Medal, did not she?" And Dudley felt a faint, awakening curiosity to see that other Miss Maclean.

"Oh, if it is going to make you sigh like that," said Melville, "I withdraw all I have said. I have no wish to sacrifice you on the altar of friendship."

"Did I sigh?" said Ralph very wearily. "It was not for that. Oh yes, dear boy, I'll go. It won't be the first time I have made a fool of myself for your sake."

And he did feel himself very much of a fool when, a few hours later, he went up on the platform of the crowded theatre to receive the pretty golden toy. The experience reminded him of his brilliant schoolboy days, and he half expected some kindly old gentleman to clap him on the shoulder as he went back to his seat. He was thankful to escape into insignificance again; and then, adjusting his gold-rimmed spectacles, he proceeded to watch for Miss Mona Maclean.

It was well that he had ceased to be the centre of attrac-

tion in the theatre. Ralph was not a blushing man, but a moment later his face became as red as the cushioned seats of the hall, and when the wave of colour passed away, it left him ashy pale. At the first sight of that dear familiar face, beautiful to-day with excitement, as he had seen it at Castle Maclean, his hard, aggrieved feeling against her vanished, and he thought only how good it would be to speak to her again. He was proud of her beauty, proud of the ovation she received, proud of his love for her.

But while the tedious ceremony went on, the facts of the case came back to him one by one, like common objects that have been blotted for the moment out of view by some dazzling light. His face settled into a heavy frown.

"I will walk along Regent Street with her," he thought, "and ask her what it all meant."

At last the "function" was over. Mona seemed to be surrounded by congratulating friends, and so indeed was he; but before many minutes had passed he found himself following her out of the hall,—gaining on her. She was very pale. Was it reaction after the excitement of the ceremony? or did she know that he was behind her?

In another moment he would have spoken, but during that moment a bluff, elderly professor, who had been looking at Mona with much interest and perplexity, suddenly seized her hand.

"Why, I declare it is Yum-Yum!" he exclaimed enthusiastically. "No wonder she took us by surprise on a deserted coast, when she wins an ovation like this at Burlington House!"

Mona stopped to speak, and Dudley passed on.

No wonder, indeed! What a blind bat, what an utter imbecile, he had been! and how he had babbled to her of his past, present, and future, while she had sat looking at him, with infinite simplicity and frankness in her honest eyes!

His lip curled with a cynical smile.

"Bravo, old chap!" said Melville's friendly voice. "It

was a genuine consolation to my misanthropic mind to reflect that one of those medals was well earned."

Ralph stopped for a minute or two to speak to his friend, and then went down the steps. Most of the carriages had gone, but, a few yards from the door, a pair of fine bays were pawing the ground. Ralph looked up and recognised his Anglo-Indian friend, Sir Douglas Munro; but Sir Douglas was waiting for a lady, and had no eyes for the clever young doctor. Ralph's glance wandered on to the next carriage, and when it came idly back to the bays, he saw that the lady had arrived. Nay, more, the lady was looking at him with a very eloquent face.

"Dr Dudley," she said, almost below her breath.

For an instant Dudley hesitated,—then gravely lifted his hat and walked on. He could not speak to her now; he must have time to think. It seemed to him that his very soul was torn in two. One half loved Mona, clamoured for her, stretched out blind hands that longed to take her on any terms, unquestioning; but the other half refused to be carried away by glamour and mere blind impulse, the other half was outraged by this trivial motiveless deception, the other half had dreamed of an ideal marriage and would not be put off with anything short of its ideal. How little he knew of her, after all! He had not met her a dozen times,—what wonder if he had been mistaken!

While he wrestled thus with himself, the mail-phaeton bowled rapidly past him. Dudley laughed gloomily. And he had meant her to trudge along Regent Street with him, and "tell him what it all meant"! What a hopeless imbecile he had been!

How could he guess that Mona would cheerfully have given three years' income to leave her uncle at that moment, and "trudge along Regent Street" with him?

"Who is that young fellow?" Sir Douglas was saying. "I seem to know his face."

"He is a Dr Dudley," Mona answered, stooping low to arrange the carriage-rug over her feet.

"Oh, to be sure. I remember—a clever fellow." Sir Douglas fell a-musing for a few minutes. "How did you pick him up, Mona? He told me when I last saw him that he did not know any of the women-students."

CHAPTER LV.

LUCY TO THE RESCUE.

"I have an idea, Mona," said Lucy.

"Have you, dear? I wish I had!"

The two girls were in the Gower Street garden again, and Lucy was swinging lazily in the hammock, just as she had done that summer day nearly two years before.

"You know I told you the Pater had had a little money left him?"

"Yes, and very glad I was to hear it."

"Well, the more I see of what is being done in a medical way in the hub of the profession here, the more I am inclined to think it might be worth while for the Mater to come in to town."

Mona did not answer for a minute or two. She was trying to intensify her recollections of Mrs Reynolds's somewhat mysterious illness.

"I think it is extremely likely," she said at last.

"I would take her to Dr Bateson, get her to go into the case thoroughly, and then choose any specialist she liked—man or woman—to consult with. Don't you think that would be wise?"

"Very."

"It is perfectly awful to think how helpless people are who are quite outside the profession. I think it is worth

while studying medicine, if only to be able to tell your friends whom to consult,—or rather, whom not to consult."

"I know. When I am low-spirited I brood over all the people whose deaths I might have prevented, if I had known what I know now. If I were a reformer, like Miss Lascelles, there is one change I would try to work in the profession. Every family able to pay for a doctor at all should give a yearly amount to some sharp-eyed, keen-witted, common-sense man or woman, who would keep an eye on the children, and detect the first trace of struma, or lateral curvature, or any of the neuroses. He need not be a great don at all. He must understand the dynamics of a vital organism in relation to its surroundings——"

"The *what?*" said Lucy.

"——know the value of iron and cod-liver oil; and, above all, see when the moment has arrived to send for a specialist. It seems to me that half the mistakes that are made would be prevented, if that plan were carried out."

"Or you might adopt the Chinese system,—salary the doctor, and stop his pay when you get ill."

Mona laughed. "The fact is, the public have not begun to realise yet how medicine is specialised, and most doctors are afraid to tell them."

There was a few minutes' silence.

"Edgar Davidson took me over St Kunigonde's yesterday," said Lucy presently.

"Who is Edgar Davidson?"

"I wish somebody would prescribe for your memory, Mona. Believe me, the moment has come, when your jog-trot, common-sense adviser"—she bowed—"suggests a specialist. Don't you remember the boy we met at Monte Carlo?"

"Oh yes, to be sure."

"He is developing a very wholesome admiration for me."

"I thought boy-worshippers were the special appanage of middle-aged women, like myself!"

"He is not such a boy, after all," said Lucy, colouring slightly. "And all his worship is reserved for a wonderful

fellow-student of his, whom he introduced to me yesterday —Dr Dudley."

Mona rearranged her cushions.

"Do you still believe in nice men, Mona?"

"I always did."

"Ah, that's a pity. You will never know the joys of conversion."

"Who has been converting the pessimist in the hammock?"

"Oh, I am a hopeless sceptic. But I like Dr Dudley all the same. He seems to have an awfully good influence on the students. He is a good deal older than they are, and he lives his life according to his own tastes, without posing as a saint or being mistaken for a muff. What I liked was his manner with those horrid dirty 'casuals.' And then he is just enough of a cynic to give an edge to it all."

"I am afraid I am too old to appreciate cynics."

"Poor soul!" said Lucy, in a tone of profound commiseration. "Life is indeed a thing of the past for you. Cynics are the spice of the world. However, it seems to me the Mater should come up at once. It would not do for her to be here during the hottest of the summer. I will write to her this very day."

She proceeded to alight from the hammock as she spoke.

"By the way, Mona," she said suddenly, "you must have seen Dr Dudley. He was Anatomy medallist."

"Yes," said Mona, and she said no more. She hoped the broad brim of her garden-hat would conceal the whiteness of her face.

This was almost the first time that any outsider had spoken to her of Dr Dudley, and she was amazed to find how strong was her sense of possession in him. It was very characteristic of her that, after the first moment of indignation, she scarcely blamed Dudley at all for his frigid greeting in Burlington Gardens. She realised vividly how things must look from his point of view—so vividly that, with that quick power of seeing both sides of a question which was her compensation for "not being a reformer," she saw also

her own danger, and cried out in her heart, "Whatever happens, let me not lose my pride!"

"I want you to come and have tea with me at the Hall on Saturday," Lucy said, when the friends met at hospital a few days later. "Knowing your love for what you are pleased to call 'sensuous beauty,' I have asked Edgar Davidson's sister to meet you. She has just come home from San Remo, and she really is the prettiest girl I ever saw in my life."

"I would go a long way to see a really beautiful woman," said Mona laughing; "but I have a young friend whose swans show an awkward tendency to turn out ugly ducklings."

"Ah, well! wait till you see Miss Davidson."

And when Saturday afternoon came, Mona confessed that Lucy was right. There could be no doubt that Angela Davidson was a beauty. A winter in the South had banished every apparent trace of delicacy, while leaving behind a bloom that was really flower-like.

"Miss Reynolds tells me that Lady Munro is your aunt," she said to Mona. "Do you think she would mind my calling to thank her for her wonderful kindness to Edgar at Monte Carlo?"

"I am sure she would be delighted to see you," Mona answered warmly; "but I expect she has entirely forgotten the incident."

"I shall not forget it as long as I live. Edgar never knew what it was to have a mother; and it seems as if people understood by a kind of instinct how terribly unwilling I was to leave him without a sister."

"*A propos* of that," said Lucy, "Miss Maclean is a co-medallist with Dr Dudley."

Miss Davidson raised wondering eyes. "You must be awfully clever," she said simply.

"Oh no; I failed twice before I carried home the medal. Do you know Dr Dudley?"

She scarcely even blushed as she asked the question. She was delighted at her own assurance and self-possession.

The girl's beautiful face lighted up. "I should think I did," she said. "He has been the turning-point in my brother's life. There is no one in the world to whom I owe so much as to Ralph Dudley."

A curious pain shot through Mona's heart. She had never experienced anything like it before, and it was gone before she could ask herself what it meant.

A few minutes later she rose to go.

"I am afraid it is taking a great liberty, with any one so busy and so clever," Miss Davidson said, in her pretty childlike fashion, "but I should be so proud if you would come and see me next Thursday. Miss Reynolds has promised to come, and I am expecting some of my very best friends."

"I will come with pleasure," said Mona quickly; and this time a more perceptible colour rose into her white forehead. She wanted to see this beautiful girl again, and—it would be interesting to know whether "Ralph Dudley" was one of her "very best friends."

That night as she sat by the open window in the twilight, looking out on the lime-trees in the garden, the same unaccountable pain came over her, and she proceeded to analyse it mercilessly. For a long time she remained there with a deep furrow on her brow.

"I thought I had attained," she said at last. "Were they all for nothing, those years of striving after the highest, with strong crying and tears? I thought I had attained, and here I am, at the end of it, only a commonplace, jealous woman after all!"

"Well," said Lucy the next day, "did I exaggerate? or is she as sweet and as pretty as they make 'em now-a-days?"

"I think she is," Mona said reflectively. "But don't introduce her to other people as a 'sensuous beauty.' The word is misleading in that connection."

He was annoyed with her for opening the subject there and then,—forgetting that women cannot always choose their opportunities,—but even as he spoke, his lips quivered; a terrible struggle was concealed beneath the calmness of his manner. One word more from her might have dragged aside the flimsy veil; but she, too, had her pride.

"Well, I am afraid I must go," she said, as Miss Davidson returned to her remaining guests. "Don't let me hurry you, Lucy; I must get that book you mentioned out of the library, Dr Dudley."

She bowed to him with a frank cordiality that was far more cutting than his coldness, shook hands with her hostess, and went away. Lucy, of course, accompanied her, and Dudley was left to reap what he had sown.

But Mona could not bear even Lucy's society to-day, and she made an excuse for parting from her before they had gone many hundred yards. Then her lithe figure straightened itself defiantly.

"Two chances I have given him," she said to herself; "and now, come what come may, he shall make the third himself!"

When Mona came in from hospital a few days later, she was met by the announcement that a gentleman had called to see her, and had said he would return in the evening.

"Did he leave no name?" she asked in some surprise.

"No, ma'am, he said it was of no consequence."

Mona bethought herself of Mr Reynolds.

"Was he an old gentleman?" she said.

"Oh no, ma'am; a youngish gentleman, tall and thin."

Mona's heart leaped. "Show him up to my sitting-room when he comes," she said quietly.

She went to her lecture as usual that afternoon, but found it difficult to give her full attention to the varieties, causes, and treatment of aneurism. The moment the class was over she hurried home, dressed with more than usual care, rearranged her flowers, dined without knowing what

was on the table, and then seated herself in her rocking-chair with a book.

But she did not read. She proceeded to make a leisurely, critical survey of the room. It looked very pretty just then in the soft evening light, and at worst it was a picturesque, suggestive place.

She rose to her feet and redraped a curtain; then she glanced with satisfaction at the soft folds of her gown, and seated herself again with a sigh. How sensible of him it was to come to her quietly, here in her own territory, where they could talk over everything thoroughly, and explain all misunderstandings!

A loud rat-tat-tat resounded through the house. Alas! she knew that imperious knock only too well! A minute later Sir Douglas and her aunt entered the room.

"You do look well," he said, holding her at arm's-length before he kissed her. "I never saw you with such a colour."

"And your rooms are so charming," said Lady Munro. "I like them a great deal better than ours in Gloucester Place."

Mona laughed. She was well used by this time to her aunt's figures of speech.

"We are on our way to dinner at the Lacys', and as we had ten minutes to spare——"

"For a wonder!" growled Sir Douglas.

"——Douglas was determined to look in upon you."

Mona smiled across brightly at her uncle, but she fervently hoped the ten minutes would be over before Dr Dudley arrived. It was at least fortunate that the engagement was dinner.

The ten minutes, however, still had half their course to run when Mona heard a timid knock at the street-door.

"That can't be his," she said to herself. But she did not find it easy to preserve her self-control when she heard footsteps coming up-stairs.

A moment later the door was thrown open, and the parlour-maid announced—

"Mr Brown from Kilwinnie."

Mona's heart stood still, but the situation had to be faced.

"How kind of you to come and see me!" she said, going forward to meet him. "Aunt Maud, Uncle Douglas, this is my friend Mr Brown."

She laid the least possible deliberate emphasis on the words "my friend," and she turned to her uncle right proudly as she said them.

Sir Douglas had risen from his chair when she did, and now he bowed somewhat formally. The lines of his mouth were a little hard. Possibly he found it difficult to suppress a smile.

Mona made a motion of her hand towards an easy-chair, and Mr Brown seated himself on the edge of it, wiping his brow with a large silk handkerchief.

"I was coming up to town on business," he said shyly, "so I got your address from Mrs Easson."

"Oh yes. How is Mrs Easson?"

"She wasn't very well a week or two back, but she seems pretty much in her usual again."

Mona turned to her aunt. "Mr Brown is a fellow-enthusiast of mine on the subject of botany," she said. "He is the greatest living authority on the fauna and flora of the district in which he lives. I want him to write a book on the subject."

"Indeed!" said Lady Munro, with a pretty assumption of interest.

Mr Brown shook his head. "No, no," he said, "Professor Bristowe was saying that; but you would need to be familiar with the whole county before you could write a book it would be worth while reading, and I never have time to get very far. It's only once a-week that I can get an afternoon away from the shop, and now I shall have less time than ever." He looked rather sheepishly at Mona, and added, "They've just over-persuaded me to take the Provostship."

"I am glad to hear they have shown so much sense," she

answered cordially. "I don't know whether you are to be congratulated or not, but I am quite sure they are."

"Oh, I don't know that. They could easily have got somebody who was more of a hand at speeches, but they would take no refusal, so to say."

There was a pause.

"I suppose you have just come up to town?" Sir Douglas remarked affably; and Mona looked at him with infinite gratitude.

"I came up last night." He looked again at Mona. "I was here once before, to-day."

She smiled. "I heard that somebody had called, but I did not know it was you. I am sorry you had the trouble of coming twice. I suppose you find London a great deal warmer than Kilwinnie?"

"It's warm everywhere just now." He turned to Sir Douglas, with an idea that his next remark was peculiarly suited to masculine ears. "It's very poor weather for the turnips."

"Ah! I suppose it is," Sir Douglas said, so genially that Mr Brown took courage, and looked at Mona's aunt.

Lady Munro's Indian shawl had fallen back, and the draper made a mental valuation of her heavy silk dress. It would be no use keeping a thing like that in his shop. Then his eye fell on Sir Douglas, and for the first time in his life he realised that a man could wear evening-dress without making a fool of himself. From the easily fitting swallow-tail his eye passed to the spotless, dazzling shirt-front, and, with something of a blush, he pulled the sleeves of his tweed coat over the cuffs which his sister had so carefully trimmed before he left home.

"I am afraid we shall have to go," Lady Munro said, glancing at Mona's carriage clock; and, as she rose, she looked somewhat pointedly at Mr Brown.

The hint was lost on him, however. He bowed awkwardly to Lady Munro, and waited till Mona returned to the sitting-room.

"Miss Maclean," he blurted out hastily, "you will be disposed to laugh at me when I tell you I came here to ask you to be my wife. I knew you were far above me, but I had no notion of the like of this. You've no need to tell me that it can never be, but if ever you stand in need of a plain man's friendship, you know who to come to."

He held out his hand, forgetful of the frayed cuff, and Mona's eyes filled with tears as she took it.

"It is true it can never be, Mr Brown," she said—"not because I am above you, but because I don't love you as a good woman will some day. But I shall be proud and grateful, as long as I live, to think that so good a man has honoured me with his love."

She went with him to the door, and with a few commonplace words they parted.

For the first time in her life Mona felt something of a contempt for Dr Dudley.

"What a fool I am," she thought, "to break my heart for you, when at least two greater men have wanted to make me their wife!"

But, even as she spoke, she knew that her words were not perfectly just.

CHAPTER LVII.

HAVING IT OUT.

Lucy had taken rooms for her mother in an unpretentious square in Bloomsbury, and Mr Reynolds had gladly agreed to spend his short summer holiday with his wife and daughter in London. Dr Alice Bateson had called the day after their arrival, and had gone into the case very thoroughly.

"There is no doubt that your mother must have an operation," she had said to Lucy, in her brusque fashion, "but it

is nothing that need make you unhappy. So far as one can see, the chances are all in her favour, and she will be a different being when it is over. I would like her to rest, and take a tonic for a week or so, in order to get up her strength as much as possible; but I should not advise her to postpone it any longer than that."

Lucy was in great spirits. "What say you to that, Daddy," she cried, "as the first-fruits of your investment in me? We shall see Mother on the top of Snowdon before the summer is over."

"I think we shall be glad to rest content with something short of that," he said, smiling, and stroking his wife's soft hair.

The operation was successfully accomplished in due course, and as soon as Mrs Reynolds was well on the way to recovery, Lucy insisted on taking her father about "to see something of life," as she expressed it.

"I thought I knew the full extent of your aunt's fascination," she said to Mona, when the latter came in one day with a basket of hothouse fruit for the invalid, "but I do wish you had seen her with Father when we called. She was a perfect woman, and a perfect child. He was awfully impressed—thinks in his heart that she is thrown away on Sir Douglas, which, in the immortal words of Euclid, is absurd. Lady Munro told me afterwards that Father made her wish she could go back and live her life all over again. 'It is so strange,' she said, with exquisite frankness, 'that he should be your father!' '"Degeneration, a Chapter on Darwinism," in fact?' I suggested; but she only smiled sweetly and said, 'What *do* you mean, child?'"

"Was Sir Douglas at home?"

"He came in for a few minutes at the end. He and my father got on all right. Of course they only met as——" she paused.

"Of course—as two men of the world."

"Do you call my father a man of the world?" Lucy asked, surprised and pleased.

"Assuredly."

"Of this world, or the other?"

Mona raised her eyes slowly. "Looked at from your father's point of view, it is a little difficult to say where this world ends and the other begins. He would tell you that this is the other world, and the other world is this."

"No, indeed, he would not. Father never gets on to the eternals with me."

This was rather a sore point with Lucy, so she hastened on, "Do you know, your aunt's 'At Home' is going to be no end of an affair?"

"Is it?"

"Yes; I am in a state of wild excitement. Father is giving me a new gown."

"I am frivolling shamefully this week," Mona said. "I have promised to go to the Bernards' at Surbiton from Saturday to Monday. I don't think I ought to go to my aunt's as well."

"Tell Sir Douglas that! By the way, while you are here, you might cast your eagle eye through that microscope, and tell me what the slide is. I forgot to label it at the time, and now I can't spot it."

Mona bent over Lucy's writing-table in the window. "I suppose you are not used to picrocarmine," she said. "It is only a 'venous congestion,' but it is cut far too thick. I can give you a much better one."

"Just scribble 'venous congestion' on the label, will you? before I forget again. Now I think of it, Miss Clark told me it must be 'venous congestion,' because that was the only red one we had mounted on a large slide! You will be shocked to hear, Mona, that I made Father take me to hear Dr Dudley lecture last night. That man's voice is worth a fortune!"

"*Far* too thick," repeated Mona, with unnecessary emphasis. "You can make out nothing with the high power at all. Where was he lecturing?"

"To his Literary Society. Angela Davidson sent a note

to tell me. It really was magnificent—on The Rose in Tennyson.[1] I thought I knew my Tennyson, but Dr Dudley's insight seemed to me perfectly wonderful. He was showing how, all through Tennyson's poems, the red rose means love, and he showed it in a thousand things I had never thought of before. He began with *The Gardener's Daughter*, and with simple idyllic quotations, like—

'Her feet have touched the meadows,
And left the daisies rosy.'

And he showed us how the whole world becomes a rose to the lover. You know the passage, beginning, 'Go not, happy day.' Then he worked us gradually on to the tragedy of love,—

'I almost fear they are not roses, but blood.'

It made one's flesh creep to hear him say that. And again triumphantly,—

'The blood-red blossom of war with a heart of fire.'

Then he took us by surprise, passed beyond human love altogether, and ended up with God's rose:—

'At last I heard a voice upon the slope
Cry to the summit, "Is there any hope?"
To which an answer pealed from that high land,
But in a tongue no man could understand;
And on the glittering limit far withdrawn
God made Himself an awful rose of dawn.'

I did not understand it all; but, when he stopped, I found my eyes were full of tears, and Father was so struck that he went up to speak to Dr Dudley before we came away."

Mona said nothing. What would she not have given to have heard that paper!

"But here comes Dad," Lucy went on. "Father, I want you to tell Mona about that lecture last night."

[1] The following sketch was suggested by a very beautiful but as yet unpublished paper, by a friend of the author.

"Your mother wants you, dear," he said, laying his hand on her shoulder, and then he seated himself by the open window.

"Yes, I confess I was very much struck," he said. "One rarely meets with such fine—*appreciation*. It seems to me that young man will make his mark. I should greatly like his help with a little bit of work I am doing on Wordsworth just now, so I asked him to come and see me some evening. He promised very cordially to do so to-morrow, and now I want him to meet my elder daughter. If you can spare the time, I am sure you would enjoy hearing him talk. Will you come?"

Mona retained sufficient presence of mind to wonder whether it was worth while trying to conceal how far she had lost it, and then she turned her white face to Mr Reynolds.

"I think I had better not come," she said, rather breathlessly. "I—know Dr Dudley."

Nay, verily! If ever they met again, it should be by no doing of hers.

"Just as you please, dear, of course."

She was a little surprised that Mr Reynolds asked no questions. She did not know that she had already given him the remaining links of her story, and that the chain in his mind was now practically complete.

All through the lecture on the previous evening, Dudley had wondered vaguely to whom the grand white head belonged, and when the owner of it came up at the close, and told him how much he had enjoyed the evening, Dudley felt the compliment much more keenly than most clever young men would have done. He was drawing sufficiently near the farther boundary of youth to dread the advance of age; and his love and admiration for Mrs Hamilton made a warm corner in his heart for all old people.

He arrived early on the evening of his appointment, and knocked at the door with a good deal of pleasant anticipa-

tion. The Reynolds seemed to have brought with them to London the atmosphere of their country home. The room was sweet with old-fashioned flowers, tea and fruit and home-made cake were laid out on the spotless cloth, and the windows were opened wide on a world of green. Moreover, the very sight of Mr Reynolds's refined and beautiful face seemed to throw the dust and turmoil of the world outside into the far distance. Petty aims lost half their attraction, the ideal became more real, when one entered that plain little room. "Is this really London?" Dudley said, as he shook hands with the invalid on the sofa.

"I am happy to say it is," she answered, smiling. "London has done great things for me."

"That is right. We hear so much of its misdeeds now-a-days that it is refreshing to be brought in contact with the other side of the question."

In a few minutes Lucy came in, bright and smiling. Dudley had not noticed her with her father at the lecture, and her relationship to the saintly old clergyman was as great a surprise to him as it had been to Lady Munro.

"How I wish I had asked Mona to come in!" she exclaimed, as she seated herself in front of the tea-tray.

No one answered, but Mr Reynolds glanced at his visitor's face.

"You know who I mean," Lucy went on, turning to Dudley, "my friend Miss Maclean. You were talking to her for a long time at the Davidsons' the other day. Is not she awfully clever?"

"Particularly, I should think."

There was no sneer in the words, but the frank, almost boyish simplicity, which had come so naturally to Dudley a few minutes before, was gone.

"'Her price is far above rubies,'" quoted Mr Reynolds quietly.

It was Dudley's turn now to raise his eyes, and glance quickly at his host.

Whenever there was a pause in the conversation, Lucy

had some fresh tale to tell about Mona. This was nothing new with her, and Mr Reynolds made no effort to prevent it. He thought it a fortunate chance that, without a hint from him, she should thus unconsciously play so effectually into his hands. He could scarcely tell whether Dr Dudley found the conversation trying or not, but there could be no doubt that the young man was profoundly interested.

"Do you know Sir Douglas Munro?" he said suddenly to Lucy.

"Oh yes, very well indeed. Do you?"

"I met him accidentally, a year or two ago, and the other day I called to ask him to give me his votes for a case I am trying to get into the Incurable Hospital. He was very cordial, and asked me to a musical evening at his house to-morrow."

"Oh, do go! It is going to be splendid, and I expect you will hear Miss Maclean sing. She has such a sympathetic voice."

Wordsworth received but scant justice when the two men retired to Mr Reynolds's study. Each felt strongly the spiritual kinship of the other, and they talked as men rarely do talk at a first or second meeting.

"I have stayed an unconscionable time," Ralph said at last, "and I hope you will let me come again. I can scarcely tell you what you have done for me. You have made me feel that 'the best is yet to be.'"

Mr Reynolds did not answer immediately. When he did, it was to say somewhat dreamily—

> "'But I need now as then,
> Thee, God, who mouldest men.'

I wish I had your voice, Dr Dudley. With such an organ, and with such a faith, you ought to be able to move mankind."

"Faith?" repeated Dudley; "I am not overburdened with that."

"By faith I did not mean creed. I was thinking of your paper the other evening."

Dudley winced. "That paper was not written yesterday," he said. "I had neither the heart nor the energy to write another, so I

'Gored mine own thought, sold cheap what is most dear.'

Greater men than I have preached to-day the faith of yesterday, in the hope that it might return to-morrow. But I am afraid that sort of faith never does return."

"Had you built your house upon the sand?"

Ralph coloured. He could not honestly say that.

"Dr Dudley," said the old man quietly, "you and I have been disposed to trust each other to-night. Before you go, there is one thing I want to tell you. You know that Miss Maclean is my daughter's friend. I don't know whether you are aware that she is as dear to me as my own child; that outside my own small family circle there is no woman living in whom I am so deeply interested. I invited her to meet you this evening, and she refused. If you had not made me respect you, I should not ask you, as I do now, to tell me why she refused?"

Dudley's face was a battle-field of conflicting emotions.

"What has she told you about me?" he said at last.

"She has never mentioned your name." Mr Reynolds hesitated; and then made up his mind to risk all, and go on. "One day I was praising her steadfastness of purpose in remaining in her uncongenial surroundings at Borrowness, and she told me, with an honesty of which I am not sure that you and I would have been capable, that—the people she met were not all uncongenial. She spoke as a girl speaks who has never thought of love or marriage; but her words conveyed more to my mind than they meant to her."

Vague as Mr Reynolds's words were, he could have chosen no surer key to unlock Ralph's heart. A vivid picture of the old idyllic days at Castle Maclean flashed across his mind,

and with it came an almost unbearable sense of regret. Oh, the pity of it! the pity of it!

"I will tell you!" he burst out suddenly. "God knows it will be a relief to speak to any man, and I believe you will understand. Besides, I *owe* an explanation to somebody who cares for her. Ninety-nine men out of a hundred would have thought nothing of it, but to me it was *just everything*. If she failed me there, she failed me everywhere. One could reason about a crime, but you can't reason about a subtle thing like that. It is in the grain of a man's mind. If it strikes you, it strikes you; and if it doesn't strike you, it doesn't strike you; and that's final. It is everything or nothing. And the worst of it is, that as things stand, I have wronged her horribly, and I can't put it right. If she were an ordinary woman it would be a matter of honour to ignore it all, and ask her to be one's wife; but she is Miss Maclean. If one has any *arrière pensée*, one must at least have the decency to let things alone, and not insult her farther."

In the course of Mr Reynolds's experience as a clergyman he had heard many incoherent confessions, but he had rarely listened to one which left him so completely in the dark as this. His face betrayed no perplexity, however, as he said, "Tell me how you met her, and where."

Then by degrees the truth began to dawn upon him. With bitter self-mockery, Dudley told the story of his doubt as to whether he could marry a "shop-girl"; told how his passion grew till it swept away all obstacles; and then he just hinted at what took place that stormy night when he brought her home from the wood.

"And you told her you loved her?" The words were spoken very quietly and as a matter of course.

Dudley's face flushed more deeply.

"I think we had both risen pretty well above the need of words that night," he said, with a nervous laugh. "When an electric spark passes between two spheres—— You see, I was weighed down by the feeling that I had wasted my life; this London course was a sort of atonement; and I

would not ask a woman to be my wife till I had at least left all schoolboy work behind me. But that night I forgot myself."

"And when you met her next——?"

"I left Borrowness the next day." Dudley's lip curled. "Our next meeting was a fine dramatic tableau at Burlington House, a modern version of the sudden transformation of Cinderella."

"But you had written to her?"

Dudley shook his head. "I had told her—before that night—that I should not be a free man till my examination was over in July. She was so quick; she always seemed to understand. But when I went down to Borrowness, half mad with longing for her—her cousin had gone to America, and Miss Maclean, I was told, was starting for Switzerland with a party of friends!"

"Did you write to her then?"

"I did not know her address. And it was no use *writing* about a thing like that. Then came my aunt's long illness. She was the best friend I had in the world, and she died."

He paused, and resumed with a sudden change of tone, "Miss Maclean told me her name was Margaret."

"Margaret is her second name."

"Of course I know," Dudley broke out again vehemently, "that thousands of men would treat the whole affair as a joke; would be glad to find that the woman they loved had money and position, after all; but I cared for Miss Maclean on a plane above that. It drives me mad to think how she sat looking at me with those honest eyes, listening to my confessions, and playing her pretty little comedy all the time."

Mr Reynolds waited in vain for Dudley to go on before he spoke.

"I cannot imagine," he said at last, "why you did not ask her to explain herself."

Dudley bit his lip. "If Miss Maclean had forged a cheque," he said, "I should have asked her to explain her-

self. It seems to me that the one thing in life of which no explanation is possible, is a difference of opinion as to what is due to friendship—or love."

"Did it never occur to you that Miss Maclean's cousin might have bound her over not to tell any one that she was a medical student?"

There was a pause.

"Why should she?" Dudley asked harshly.

"*Why* she did it I presume was best known to herself—though, considering the kind of person she seems to have been, it does not strike me as particularly surprising; but one thing I am in a position to say unhesitatingly, and that is, that she *did* do it."

Another long pause.

"Even if she did," Dudley said, "what was a trumpery promise like that between her and me, if she loved me?"

"Perhaps you did not give her much opportunity to speak of herself; but when I saw her in October, she certainly *did* not love any man. Whether you taught her to love you afterwards, you are of course the best judge. I do not think she was bound to tell you before she knew that you loved her; and, judging from your own account of what took place, you do not seem to have made it very easy for a self-respecting woman to tell you afterwards."

Little by little the truth of this came home to Ralph, as he sat with his eyes fixed on the glowing embers of the fire.

Mr Reynolds gave his words time to take full effect, and then went on.

"When I think how you have made that sensitive *girl* suffer, Dr Dudley, I am tempted to forget that I owe my knowledge of the circumstances entirely to your courtesy."

Ralph looked up with a rather wintry smile.

"Don't spare me," he said. "Hit hard!" And then there was another long silence.

"The one thing I cannot explain," said Mr Reynolds, "is her telling you that her name was Margaret."

"Oh, that's simple enough. It was in early days. I was

talking of the name in the abstract, and she said it was hers; I daresay she never thought of the incident again; and then I saw it in her prayer-book — her mother's, no doubt. Mr Reynolds, I have been a blind fool; but I do think still that she ought to have told me."

"Since the old man has your permission to hit hard, you will allow me to say, that I think you do not realise how far injured pride has a share in your righteous indignation; but I have no wish to convince you. I would fain see my 'elder daughter' the wife of a nobler man."

Ralph smiled in spite of himself.

"That certainly is delivered straight out from the shoulder!" he said; "but do you think it is quite just? Every man is exacting on certain points. That was mine. But I am not a savage. No woman on earth should be so free and so honoured as my wife."

Mr Reynolds rose and held out his hand.

"It is midnight," he said, "and I have no more to say. Go home and think about it."

But when Ralph left the house, it was not to go home, but to pace up and down the squares, in such a tumult of excitement and thanksgiving as he had never known before.

CHAPTER LVIII.

"LOVE MAY GO HANG!"

Lady Munro's "At Home" proved, as Lucy had predicted, "no end of an affair." Sir Douglas considered it snobbish to entertain on a scale beyond the resources of his own *ménage;* but, if the thing was to be done, he would at least have it done without any visible straining on the part of host and hostess. So the rooms at Gloucester Place were

given over to the tender mercies of Liberty and Gunter for a day or two, and during that time most people found it advisable to keep out of Sir Douglas's way.

When Mona alighted from her cab on the expanse of crimson drugget before the door, she would not have recognised her aunt's rooms. The half lights, the subtle Eastern aroma, and the picturesque figure of Nubboo had disappeared, giving place to a blaze of pretty lamps, festoons of æsthetic drapery, profuse vegetation, and groups of magnificent footmen.

"Come along, Mona!" Evelyn cried impatiently. "Lucy has been here for half an hour. I was so afraid you would be too late to see the rooms before the bloom is knocked off them. The supper-table is simply a dream."

"*Bless my soul!*" said Lucy, in an awestruck whisper, as Mona threw off her cloak. "You do look imposing! Mary Stuart going to the scaffold is not in it. I don't think I ever saw you in black before. If only you would show a little more of that swan-white neck and arms, I honestly believe this would be the achievement by which you would live in history."

"The fact is," Mona said, laughing, "it has been borne in upon me lately that the youthfulness of my appearance now-a-days is dependent on the absence from the stage of sweet seventeen; so I resolved, like Sir Walter Scott, to strike out in a new line. I aim at dignity now. This"—she glanced over her shoulder at the stately figure in the pier-glass—"is my *Waverley*. I flatter myself that you young Byrons can't compete with me here."

"No, indeed! Schoolgirl is the word," Lucy said, ruefully stepping in front of Mona to survey her own pretty gown in the pier-glass; but this was so palpably untrue that they all laughed.

"I am sure you looked dignified enough in the blue velvet. I wonder you did not wear your diamonds, Mona, while you were about it?"

"I wanted to, but I did not dare to do it without asking

Uncle Douglas, and he would not hear of such a thing. The old darling! He sent me these white orchids to make up. I must go and let him see how they look, before people begin to arrive."

But Sir Douglas was only half pleased with Mona's gown.

"It is all very well in a crowd like this, perhaps," he said, "but don't wear that dowager plumage when we are by ourselves."

An hour later the rooms were full, and a crowd had gathered in the street below to listen to the music, and to catch an occasional glimpse of fair faces and dainty gowns.

Several professional singers had been engaged, but when most of the people had gone down to supper, and the music-room was half empty, Sir Douglas begged Mona to sing.

"We want something to rest our nerves," he said, "after all that. Sing that little thing of Beethoven's."

He had heard her singing it in her own room one day, when she did not know he was within hearing, and the pathetic song had been a favourite with him ever since.

It was a fine exercise in self-control, and Mona accepted it. The excitement of the evening raised her somewhat above the level of her own personality, and she thought she could do justice to the pathos of the song without spoiling it by feeling too much.

> "But if thy vow weary thee now,
> Though I should weep for thee, come not to me."

The door of the music-room stood open, and it was fortunate for the success of her song that the last wailing notes had died away before she caught sight of a figure on the landing, reflected in the mirror opposite.

In an instant the sympathetic pleading look went out of her face; she struck a few defiant chords, and launched into Moore's quaint, piquant little melody:—

> "When Love is kind, cheerful, and free,
> Love's sure to find welcome from me;
> But when Love brings heartache and pang,
> Tears and such things, Love may go hang!

If Love can sigh for one alone,
Well-pleased am I to be that one;
But if I see Love giv'n to rove
To two or three,—then good-bye, Love!

Love must, in short, keep fond and true,
Through good report and evil too;
Else here I swear young Love may go,
For aught I care, to Jericho!"

She sang with great *verve*, and of course there was a storm of applause as she finished.

Ralph, looking on, could scarcely believe his eyes and ears. Was she thinking of him? Had his love brought her heartache and pang? He would fain have persuaded himself at that moment that it had; but the very idea of such a thing seemed ridiculous as he looked at her now.

What a chameleon she was! Ever since his conversation with Mr Reynolds the night before, he had pictured her looking up in his face with that sweet half-childlike expression, "Dr Dudley, what have I done?" and here she was, cold, brilliant, self-possessed, surrounded by a group of men of the world, and apparently very much at her ease with them.

"Why, Mona!" Sir Douglas said, laying his hand on her arm.

It was a pretty sight to see how her face changed.

"Don't be angry," she said coaxingly, turning away from the others. "We have had nothing but sentiment all evening, and it proved nauseous at last."

"We will discuss that another time. Come now and have some supper."

Dudley escaped into the adjoining room. He felt positively jealous of Sir Douglas.

"What the deuce did I come here for?" he said, looking round the sea of unknown faces. He would not own, even to himself, that he had come in the hope of having a long talk with Mona. But just then he caught sight of Lucy Reynolds, and went up to speak to her.

"Oh, Dr Dudley, I am so glad to see you," she said eagerly.

This was very soothing, and Ralph seated himself on a vacant chair beside her.

"I hope your father may be able to say the same when I meet him next. I am afraid I proved a heavy strain on his endurance last night."

"Oh no! I will spare your blushes, and not tell you what father said of you at breakfast this morning."

But this remark had not the desired effect of sparing Ralph's blushes.

"Do you know many people here?" he asked.

"No, I am rather out of it."

"So am I. It was quite refreshing to see a face I knew."

"Have you seen Miss Maclean?"

"I have heard her sing. She seems to be greatly in requisition."

"Well, of course she is practically a daughter of the house, and Miss Munro is so young."

"May I have the pleasure of taking you down to supper?"

"Thank you, I have promised to go with Mr Lacy. Here he comes."

And Ralph was left alone once more. He could not tear himself away from the house till he had seen Mona again; and, while he waited, he suddenly espied his friend Jack Melville.

"How in the world do you come to be here?" he asked, surprised.

"If I had not been well brought up, dear boy, I should repeat the question. As it is, with characteristic complaisance I answer it. I am here, firstly, because I cherish a hopeless passion for Lady Munro; secondly, because my cousins were kind enough to bring me."

"I did not know you knew the Munros."

"My acquaintance with them is not profound. It is enough to see Lady Munro, and hear her speak. She is simply perfect; at least I thought so until I was introduced to her niece. Jove! Ralph, that is a stunning girl!"

Ralph did not answer.

"Did you see her sing?"

"I heard her."

"Ah, but you should have seen her. She changed completely when she sang that first thing. She has a face like your *Nydia*."

At this moment Mona entered the room on her uncle's arm. She was, as Ralph had said, very much in requisition, and it was almost impossible to get a chance to speak to her. Ralph was very pale with excitement. Convinced as he now was that he had inflicted a great deal of unnecessary suffering, possibly on her, and certainly on himself, he would not have found it easy to face even Miss Simpson's assistant. How, then, was he to address this woman of the world, who sat there so thoroughly at ease in her own circle, so utterly regardless of him?

Ralph watched his opportunity, however, and when Mona rose, he took his courage in both hands.

"Miss Maclean," he said, in a low voice, "will you allow me to see you to your carriage?"

"Thank you very much," she said simply, "but I have promised to stay here all night."

Ralph bit his lip. No, certainly she had not been thinking of him when she sang that song.

He made a few commonplace remarks, to which Mona replied quietly, but it was maddening work trying to talk to her in that crowd, and he soon gave up the attempt in despair. To-morrow, thank heaven! he could see her alone.

"Have not you had enough of this, Jack?" he said to his friend. "I vote we go home."

"Done! Let's go and have a smoke."

When the two men entered Dudley's sitting-room, Jack walked straight up to the *Nydia* on the wall.

"There!" he said triumphantly. "Miss Maclean might have stood for that."

"Or you might!" said Ralph scornfully.

But when his friend was gone, he owned to himself that

there was a superficial resemblance to Mona in the contour of the face, and in the breadth of movement suggested by the artist. Ralph laid down his meerschaum and walked across the room to look at it.

The blind girl was carrying roses—white roses—all white. One red rose had been among them, but it had fallen unheeded to the ground, and would soon be trodden under foot on the tesselated pavement. Why had she dropped the red rose? She could ill spare that.

And then a curious fancy came upon him, and he asked himself whether Mona too had dropped her red rose. She had seemed so cold, so self-possessed, so passionless. Did the red rose lie quite, quite behind her? Was it already withered and trampled under foot, or could he still help her to pick it up again?

"Oh, my love, my love," he said, "you don't really care for all those men! You do belong to me, don't you? don't you?"

But at this point Ralph's thoughts became incoherent, if indeed they had not been so before.

To-morrow, at least, thank God! she would be out of the din and crowd; to-morrow he could see her alone, and say whatever he would.

CHAPTER LIX.

AT LAST!

Neither Ralph nor Mona slept much that night.

Mr Reynolds had said nothing to his "elder daughter" about his conversation with Dr Dudley. He had sufficient confidence in her absolute honesty to believe that she would do herself more justice if she were taken unprepared; but

Ralph's manner at the Munros' had been a revelation in itself, and Mona felt sure that night that, for better or worse, some great change had taken place in his feelings towards her.

"Let me not lose my pride!" she cried. "Nothing can alter the fact that he has treated me cruelly—cruelly."

She had promised to go down to Surbiton to spend a day or two with a fellow-student, and, unwilling as she was to leave London at this juncture, she determined to keep her promise to the letter.

So when Ralph knocked at her door in the early afternoon, he was met by the news that she had gone to the country till Monday. She had started only a few minutes before, and had left no address; but the maid had heard her tell the cabman to drive to Waterloo.

Two minutes later Ralph was tearing through the streets in a hansom. He had wasted time enough, fool that he was! Nothing should induce him now to wait another hour.

Just outside the station he met Lucy.

"Mona is starting for Surbiton," she said. "I am hurrying to catch a train at Cannon Street."

"Alone?"

Lucy did not ask to whom he referred. "Yes," she said.

"Thank you." He lifted his hat, and turned away without another word. With the reckless speed of a schoolboy he tore through the station, and overtook the object of his search as she passed inside the rail of the booking office.

"Two first-class tickets for Surbiton," he said, before she had time to speak.

"One third-class return for Surbiton," said Mona, with a dignity that strangely belied the beating of her heart.

"No hurry, sir," said the man, stamping Mona's ticket first. "You have three minutes yet."

"I have got your ticket," Dudley said, joining Mona on the platform. "You will come with me."

The words were spoken almost more as a command than as a request.

("Let me not lose my pride!")

"Thank you very much," she said; "I never travel first-class."

"You will to-day."

Her only answer was to open the door of a third-class carriage.

Dudley bit his lip—then smiled. "Do you *prefer* a smoking-carriage?" he said.

She laughed nervously, and, moving on to the next, entered it without a word. Ralph longed to follow her, but he prudently thought better of it.

With punctilious courtesy he saw her into the carriage; and then, closing the door, he lifted his hat and walked away.

Mona turned very pale.

"I cannot help it," she said. "He has treated me cruelly, and he cannot expect me to forget it all in a moment." But I think it would have done Ralph's heart good if he could have seen the expression of her face.

Very slowly the train moved off, but Ralph's lucky star must have been in the ascendant, for at the last moment a party of rough men burst open the door, and projected themselves into the carriage where Mona was sitting alone. They did not mean to be offensive, but they laughed and talked loudly, and spat on the floor, and fondled their pipes in a way that was not suggestive of prolonged abstinence from the not very fragrant weed.

At the first station Ralph opened the door.

"You seem rather crowded here," he said, in a voice of cold courtesy. "There is more room in a carriage further along. Do you think it worth while to move?"

"Thank you," said Mona, and she rose and took his hand.

"Let me not lose my pride!" she prayed again, but she felt, as she had done that night long ago in the shadow of the frosted pines, as if the earth was slipping away from under her feet.

He followed her into the carriage and closed the door. It

was big with meaning for both of them, the sound of that closing door.

Neither spoke until the train had moved off.

"You need not have been so afraid to grant me an interview, Miss Maclean," he said at length. I only wished to ask your forgiveness."

In one great wave the blood rushed over her face, and she held out her hand.

"Oh, Dr Dudley, forgive *me!*" she said.

"I want to," he said quite simply. "I have been far more to blame than you, but that is nothing. Tell me about it. Did our friendship mean nothing to you?—had I no claim upon your candour? Don't look out of the window; look me in the face."

"Dr Dudley," she said, "you are so quick, so clever, did you not see? My cousin had asked me not to say that I was a medical student, and I had promised faithfully to do as she wished. It never entered my mind at that time that I might want to tell any one down there, and—and—I did not know till that night at the fir-wood—— But I can't bear to have mysteries, even from my friends, and a dozen times I was going to ask her permission to tell you, but somehow I had not the courage. One morning, in the shop, after your first visit to Rachel, I wanted to tell you then, and risk her anger afterwards; but my heart beat so fast that I was ashamed to speak. Don't you see? It was one of those trifles that one thinks about, and thinks about, till one can't say or do them—like stopping to consider before jumping across an easy crevasse. And yet, let me say this one thing in my own defence. You can scarcely conceive how little opening you gave me, how absolutely you took me for granted."

An expression of infinite relief had come over his face while she was speaking; but now he winced and drew down his brows. "Don't!" he ejaculated gloomily. Then he shook himself. "I retract that 'Don't,'" he said. "You shall say what you please. Your touch is a great deal gentler than my boundless egotism deserves."

"It was not egotism," Mona said, recovering her self-possession in a moment, with a pretty toss of her head. "I will not be cheated out of the gracefullest compliment that ever was paid to me. I should have been dreadfully hurt if you had told me I was out of perspective."

"Your reading is the correct one," said Dudley gravely. "You are perfectly right."

But his own confession was still to make, and he was determined not to make it by halves.

"In the course of our acquaintance, Miss Maclean," he began somewhat stiltedly, "you have known me in the threefold capacity of snob, fool, and child."

"In the course of our acquaintance," Mona interrupted hastily, "I have known you in the threefold capacity of teacher, friend, and——"

"And what?"

She laughed. "Memory fails me. I don't know."

His eyes glowed like fire.

"Don't you?" he said, with a tremor in his beautiful voice. "*Come and learn!*"

He rose and held out his arms.

Mona tried to laugh, but the laugh died away on her lips; she looked out of the window, but the landscape swam before her eyes; even the noisy racketing of the train sank away into the background of her perception, and she was conscious of nothing save the magnetism of his presence, and then of the passionate pressure of his arms. Her head fell back, and her beautiful lips—all ignorant and undefended—lay just beneath his own.

Oh human love! what are you?—the fairest thing that God has made, or a Will-o'-the-wisp sent to brighten a brief space of life's journey with delusive light? I know not. This I know, that when Ralph sent a kiss vibrating through Mona's being, waking up a thousand echoes that had scarcely been stirred before, the happiness of those two human souls was almost greater than they could bear.

CHAPTER LX.

ON THE RIVER.

Mona did not go to Surbiton, after all, that day. She telegraphed to her friend from Clapham Junction, and then she and Ralph took the train to Richmond.

"Let me take you for a pull on the river," he had said. "I have never done anything for you in my life, and my arms just ache to be used in your service. Oh Mona, Mona, Mona! it seems too good to be possible that you are still the same simple, true-hearted girl that I knew at Castle Maclean. By the way, do you know that Castle Maclean is yours for life now? At least Carlton Lodge is, and only the sea-gulls are likely to dispute my princess's claim to her battlements."

He handed her into a boat, and rowed out into the middle of the river.

"Now," he said, "you shall see what your slave's muscles are worth."

Like an arrow the little boat shot through the water in the sunshine, and Mona laughed with delight at the exhilaration of the swift rushing movement.

"That will do, Dr Dudley," she said at last. "Don't kill yourself."

"I don't answer to the name," he said shortly, pulling harder than ever.

"Oh, do please stop!" she cried.

"Who is to stop?" he panted, determined not to give in.

There was a moment's pause. A deep rosy colour settled on her eager face.

"Ralph," she said, scarcely above a whisper.

The oars came to a standstill with a splash in the middle of a stroke, and Ralph leaned forward with a low delighted laugh. Then he sighed.

"You had no eyes for me last night, Mona," he said.

"Had not I?"

"*Had you?*" very eagerly.

But when the language of looks and smiles begins, the historian does well to lay aside his pen. Are not these things written in the memory of every man and woman who has lived and loved?

Not that there was any lack of words between them that day. They had such endless arrears of talk to make up; and a strange medley it would have sounded to a third pair of ears. Now they were laughing over incidents in their life at Borrowness, now exchanging memories of childhood, and now consulting each other about puzzling cases they had seen in hospital.

It was a long cloudless summer day, and for these two it was one of those rare days when the cup of pure earthly happiness brims over, and merges into something greater. Every simple act of life took on a fresh significance now that it was seen through the medium of a double personality; every trifling experience was full of flavour and of promise, like the first-fruits of an infinite harvest.

What is so hard to kill as the illusions of young love? Crushed to-day under the cynicism and the grim experience of the ages, they raise their buoyant heads again to-morrow, fresher and more fragrant than ever.

"I am going in to see Mr Reynolds for a few minutes," Ralph said, as they walked home in the twilight. "Do you know when I can see your uncle?"

"On Monday morning, I should think—not too early. I want to tell you about Sir Douglas. He never was my guardian, and two years ago I had not even seen him; but his kindness to me since then has been beyond all words. Whatever he says—and I am afraid he will say a great deal—you must not quarrel with him. He won't in the end refuse me anything I have set my heart on. You see, he scarcely knows you at all, and that whole Borrowness episode is hateful to him beyond expression."

And indeed, when Ralph called at Gloucester Place on

Monday, Sir Douglas forgot himself to an extent which is scarcely possible to a gentleman, unless he happen to be an Anglo-Indian.

Ralph stated his case well and clearly, but for a long time Sir Douglas could scarcely believe his ears. When at last doubt was no longer possible, he sat for some minutes in absolute silence, the muscles of his face twitching ominously.

"By Jove! sir, you have the coolness of Satan!" he burst forth at last, in a voice of concentrated passion; and every word that Ralph added to better his cause was torn to pieces and held up to derision with merciless cruelty.

The moment his visitor was out of the house, Sir Douglas put on his hat and went in search of Mona.

"It is not true, is it," he said, "that you want to marry that fellow?"

So Mona told the story of how the clever young doctor fell in love with the village shop-girl.

"King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid, in fact," he sneered. "If that young whipper-snapper had had the impertinence to tell me that he thought you were really a shop-girl, I should have knocked him down on my own doorstep. Who is Dr Dudley? I never heard of him before."

"I am afraid I am no authority on pedigrees," Mona said, smiling. "But I have no doubt you could get the required information from Colonel Lawrence."

To the last Sir Douglas maintained that he could not imagine what Mona saw in the fellow; but he came by degrees to admit to himself that things might have been worse. If Mona was determined to practise medicine, as was certainly the case, it was as well that she should have a man to relieve her of those parts of the work in which her womanhood was not an essential factor; and it was a great matter to think that he could have his niece in London under his own eye.

Jack Melville's opinion was characteristic.

"Well played, Ralph!" he exclaimed. "It just shows that one never ought to despair of a man. When you went

down to Borrowness after your Intermediate, I could have sworn that the siren was going to have an easy walk over."

"I am glad you both had sense enough to settle it so quickly," Lucy said phlegmatically, when Mona told her the news.

"Do you mean to say you suspected anything?"

"Suspected! I call that gratitude! The first time I saw Dr Dudley at St Kunigonde's, he said the surgery was as close as a Borrowness town-council room; and as soon as I mentioned him to you, I saw it all. I have been trying to bring you together ever since. *Suspect*, indeed! I can tell you, Mona, it was as well for my peace of mind that I did suspect."

"What a she-Lothario it is!"

"Don't be alarmed," said Lucy loftily. "When I was a child I thought as a child, but—I have outgrown all such frivolities. I—*I* am to be the advanced woman, after all! When you and Doris are lost in your nurseries, I shall be posing as a martyr, or leading a forlorn hope!"

CHAPTER LXI.

A *FIN-DE-SIÈCLE* COURTSHIP.

It was arranged that the wedding should take place as soon as Ralph and Mona had passed their M.B. examination in the October of the following year; and during the fifteen months that intervened, they resolved to devote themselves with a whole heart to their studies, and if possible to forget that they were lovers.

"It would never do to fail at this juncture," Mona said, when the first week of their engagement came to an end, "and I certainly shall fail if we go on living at this rate. I

have a great mind to go to the Colquhouns', and study at the Edinburgh School."

This arrangement was rendered needless, however, by Dudley's election as house-surgeon at St Kunigonde's,—an appointment which left him little time for reading, and less for any kind of recreation.

So they rarely saw each other more than once a week, and on these occasions Mona decreed that they should meet simply as good friends and comrades.

"For you must see, Ralph," she said, "how easy it is to crowd the life and energy of seven days into that one weekly meeting."

"Your will shall be law," he said. "What a spending we shall have some day, after all this saving!"

But I doubt whether any man ever got more pleasure from his courtship than Ralph did. There was a very subtle delight about the pretty pretence that the touch of Mona's hand meant no more than the touch of a friend's; and, in proportion as she gave him little, he valued that little much.

So the winter passed away, and summer came round once more.

Doris's marriage was to take place in August, and, a few weeks before the Sahib came to England to claim her, she went to London to visit Mona, and to order her outfit.

"I am just choosing my own things in my few spare hours," Mona said, the day after her friend's arrival, "so we can go shopping together."

They were sitting at afternoon tea, and Lucy had run in to borrow a book.

"You don't mean to say," Doris said, in great surprise, "that you are having a trousseau? When one is going to India, of course one requires things; but at home—it is a barbarous idea."

"Dear Doris," Mona said, "what do you suppose I am marrying for?"

"Miss Colquhoun does not understand," said Lucy. "A *Trousseau* is a thing no medical practitioner can be without

See, there it stands in five goodly volumes on the second shelf,—particularly valuable on the subject of epilepsy."

"Lucy, do talk sense," said Mona, laughing.

"I appeal to any unbiassed listener to say whether I am not the only person present who is talking sense. But seriously, Miss Colquhoun, I wish I had a rich and adoring uncle. To have a trousseau like Mona's I would marry the devil!"

She set down her cup and ran away, before either of them could enter a protest.

"Will she ever really be a doctor?" Doris asked doubtfully.

"Oh yes, indeed. Your presence seems to rouse a spirit of mischief within her, but you have no idea how she has developed. She will make a much better doctor than I shall. She would have been on the Register now but for her illness; as it is, she goes in with Ralph and me in October."

"Are you going to get another medal?"

"No, no," Mona said gravely. "I only aim at a pass, and I think I am pretty sure of that. There are fewer pitfalls than there were in the Intermediate for my mighty scientific mind. But we can talk of that another time. I want to hear about some one else now. Does your father really consent to your going to India?"

"Dear old Dad!" said Doris, smiling. "He is coming with us. He has not had a long holiday for years, and everybody goes to India now-a-days. When he comes back, I expect one of my aunts will keep house for him."

"He will miss you sadly; but I am very glad the Fates are smiling so brightly on the dear old Sahib."

Doris's face flushed. "Do you know, Mona," she said, "it is a dream of mine that I may be of some use in India. Knowing you so well, I shall be a sort of link between the cause here and the cause there; and I may be able in a small way to bring the supply into relation with the demand. If only I were going out as a qualified practitioner!"

"Oh, Doris, Doris! don't you see that an enthusiast who has no connection with the movement, and who happens to

be the wife of the Deputy-Commissioner, will be able to do far more than an average doctor?"

"Especially when the Deputy-Commissioner is as much of an enthusiast as his wife," Doris answered with a very pretty blush.

"And I think it is worth living for to be able to show that a woman can be an enthusiast and a reformer, and at the same time a help meet for her husband."

Mona watched her friend rather anxiously as she said this, but Doris answered quite simply, "How often I shall long for you to talk to! The Sahib, as you call him, says that most of the women he meets out there have gone off on a wrong line, and want a little judicious backing before one can safely preach advancement to them; but it seems to me that the great majority of women only need to have things put before them in their true light. Don't you think so?"

"I don't know, dear," Mona said thoughtfully. "I am afraid I never try to influence my sex. I live a frightfully irresponsible life. Let me give you another cup of tea?"

"No, thank you. I shall have to drink a cup with my aunt, if I go to pay my respects to her. In fact, I ought to be there now."

She hurried away, and Mona was left alone. She did not rise from her chair, and half an hour later she was roused from a deep reverie by a well-known knock at the door.

"Come in!" she cried. "Oh Ralph, how delightful! Let me make you some fresh tea."

"No, thank you, my queen. It was my day out, and I could not settle to work till I had had a glimpse of you."

"I don't need to confess that I have been doing nothing," she said, holding out her empty hands. "The fact is, I am horribly depressed."

"Having a reaction?"

"I should think I was—a prussian-blue reaction, as Lucy would say."

"Examination fever?"

"Far worse than that. You see, dear, it's a great respon-

sibility to become a registered practitioner, and it's a great responsibility to be married; and the thought of undertaking the two responsibilities at once is simply appalling."

"But we are going away for a good holiday in the first instance; and even when we come back, brilliant as we both are, I don't suppose we shall burst into busy practice all at once."

"I am not afraid of feeling pulses and taking temperatures," said Mona gravely, "nor even of putting your slippers to the fire. The thought that appals me is, that one must hold one's self up and look wise, and have an opinion about everything. No more glorious Bohemian irresponsibility: no more airy—'Bother women's rights!' One must have a hand to show, and show it. Ralph, do sit down!—No, on the other side of the fire—and let us discuss the Franchise."

"With all my heart. Shall we toss for sides?"

"If you like. I went once to a Women's Suffrage conversazione, and—well, I left without signing a petition. But the next day I heard two young women discussing it, chin in air.

"'I am interested in no cause,' said one, 'that excludes the half of humanity.'

"'As long as I live,' said the other, 'I prefer that men should open the door for me when I leave a room, or shut the window when I feel a draught.'

"I said nothing, but I put on my hat and set out to sign the petition."

"And did you do it?"

"Sagely asked! No, I did not. I reflected that I had a student's inherent right to be undecided; but that suit is played out now. Seriously, dear, it seems to me sometimes in my ignorance as if we women had gone half-way across a yawning chasm on a slender bridge. The farther shore, as we see it now, is not all that our fancy pictured; but it still seems on the whole more attractive than the one we have left behind. *Que faire?* We know that in life there is no going back; nor can we stand on the bridge for ever. I could not even advise, if I were asked. My attitude of mind

on the subject would be best represented by one great point of interrogation. Only the future can show how the woman question is going to turn out, and in the meantime the making of the future lies in our own hands. There is a situation for you!"

She had opened the subject half in jest, but now her face wore the expression of intense earnestness, which in Dudley's eyes was one of her greatest charms. It interested him profoundly to watch the workings of her mind, and to see her opinions in the making. Perhaps it interested him the more, because it was the only form of intimacy she allowed.

"You must bear in mind," he said, "that every cause has to go through its hobbledehoy stage. The vocal cords give out dissonant sounds enough, when they are in the act of lengthening out to make broader vibrations; but we would not on that account have men speak all their lives in the shrill treble of boyhood."

"True," said Mona, "true;" and she smiled across at him.

Presently she sighed, and clasped her hands behind her head. "It must be a grand thing to lead a forlorn hope, Ralph," she said. "It must be so easy to say, 'Here I stand,' if one feels indeed that one cannot do otherwise. It would be a terrible thing for the leaders of any movement to lose faith in the middle of the bridge, and, if we cannot strengthen their hands, we are bound at least not to weaken them. A negative office, no doubt, and more liable than any partisanship to persecution; but, fortunately, here as everywhere, there is the duty next to hand. If we try to make the girls over whom we have any influence stronger and sweeter and sounder, we cannot at least be retarding the cause of women."

"Scarcely," said Ralph with a peculiar smile. "So, to return to the point we started from, we are not called upon to show our hand, after all."

Mona laughed. "In other words, don't let us take stock of our conclusions, Ralph," she said, "for that is intellectual death."

CHAPTER LXII.

IN ARCADIA.

It was a December afternoon. The sun shone down from a cloudless sky on the olive-woods of Bordighera, and Ralph lay stretched on a mossy terrace, looking up at the foliage overhead. It filled him with keen delight, that wonderful green canopy, shading here, as it did, into softest grey, glowing there into gold, or sparkling into diamonds. The air was soft and fragrant, and, away beyond the little town, he felt, though he could not see, the blue stretch of the Mediterranean. It seemed to him as though the stormy river of his life had merged into an ocean of infinite content. For the moment, ambition and struggle were dead within him, and he looked neither behind nor before.

The crackling of a dry twig made him turn round.

"Come along, sweetheart," he said; "I have been lazily listening for your step for the last half-hour."

"Then you began to listen far too soon," she said, seating herself beside him, and putting her hand in his. "But I am a few minutes late. The post came in just as I was starting."

"No letters, I hope?"

"Two for me—from Doris and Auntie Bell. I suppose you don't care to read them?"

He shook his head. "Not if you will boil them down for me."

"They had a delightful passage, and seem to be as happy as two human beings can be."

"Nay, that we know is impossible."

"Well, *nearly* as happy, let us say. Doris found my letter awaiting her at Bombay,—not the one that told of your 'Double First'; but she was delighted to hear that we had all passed. She did not in the least believe that Lucy would."

"Trust Miss Reynolds not to fail! One would as soon expect her to do brilliantly."

"Doris says I am not to forget to tell her whether Maggie's soups and sauces satisfy my lord and master."

He laughed. "I seem to recognise Miss Colquhoun in that last expression. What does Auntie Bell say?"

"She would dearly like to come and visit us in London; but her husband seems to be breaking up, and she has everything to superintend on the farm; so she 'maun e'en pit her mind past it, in the meantime.' You will be interested to hear that Matilda Cookson has carried her point. She goes up for her Preliminary Examination in July; and, if she passes, she is to join the Edinburgh School in October."

"You are a wonderful woman."

"Oh, by the way, Ralph, they are having an impromptu dance at the hotel to-night."

His face clouded. "Do you like dancing?" he asked.

"Very much indeed. Why don't you claim me for the first waltz?"

"Because I can't dance a little bit. You would lose every atom of respect you have for the creature, if you saw him being 'led through a quadrille,' as they call it."

"Would I? *Try me!*"

What a wonderful face it was, when she let it say all that it would! Ralph took it very tenderly between his hands, and greedily drank in its love and loyalty. Then he turned away. How he loathed the thought of this dance! There were one or two men in the house whom Mona had met repeatedly in London, and the thought of her dancing with them gave him positive torture.

"Come, friend!" he said to himself roughly. "We are not going to enact the part of the jealous husband at this time of day;" but when he entered the *salon* that evening, some time after the dance had begun, and morbidly noted the impression made by Mona's appearance there, he would gladly have given two years of his life to be able to waltz.

Of course he must look as if he enjoyed it, so he moved

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"It is a taste
he said quietly.
hotel?"

"Yes, let us go to our own quiet sitting-room. And, please, be quite sure, Ralph, that I don't care for dancing one bit. I used to, when I was a girl, and I did think I should love to have a waltz with you; but, as you say, this is a thousand times better."

They walked back to the house in silence.

"Oh, Mona, my very own love," he said, throwing a great knot of olive-wood on to the blazing fire, "what muddlers those women are who *obey* their husbands!"

Mona did not answer immediately. She seated herself on the white rug at his feet, and took his hands in hers.

"Obedience comes very easy when one loves," she said at last,—"dangerously easy. I never realised it before. But passion dies, they tell us, and the tradition of obedience lives and chafes; and then the flood-gates of all the miseries are opened. Don't ever let me obey you, Ralph!"

"My queen!" he said. "Do you think I would blot out all the exquisite *nuances* of your tact and intuition with a flat, level wash of brute obedience? God help me! I am not such a blind bungler as that. Don't talk of passion dying, Mona. I don't know what it is I feel for you. I think it is every beautiful feeling of which my soul is capable. It cannot die."

"Ralph," said Mona, "man of the world, do I need to tell you that we must not treat our love in spendthrift fashion, like a mere boy and girl? Love is a weed. It springs up in our gardens of its own accord. We trample on it; but it flourishes all the more. We cut it down, mangle it, root it up; but it seems to be immortal. Nothing can kill it. Then at last we say, 'You are no weed; you are beautiful. Grow there, and my soul shall delight in you.' But from that hour the plant must be left to grow at random no more. If it is, it will slowly and gradually droop and wither. We must tend it, water it, guard with the utmost care its exquisite bloom; and then——"

"And then?"

"And then it will attain the perfectness and the propor-

tions that were only suggested in the weed, and it will live for ever and ever."

"Amen!" said Ralph fervently. "Mona, how is it you know so much? Who taught you all this about love?"

She smiled. "I had some time to think about it after that night at Barntoun Wood. And I think my friends have very often made me their confidante. It is so easy to see where other people fail!"

CHAPTER LXIII.

"VARIUM ET MUTABILE."

"You escaped us last night, Mrs Dudley," said one of her acquaintances next morning.

"Yes. I wanted to watch the dancing; but the *salon* gets so warm in the evening, I could not stand it. We went for a stroll instead."

"Neither of you gives us too much of your company, certainly. I am anxious to hear your husband's opinion of a leader in this morning's *Times*."

"Here he comes, then," said Mona, as Ralph appeared with a rug over his arm. "Captain Bruce wants to speak to you, dear. You will know where to find me by-and-bye."

She strolled on into the woods, and ensconced herself comfortably on a gnarled old trunk, to wait for her husband. It was not many minutes before he joined her.

"That's right!" he said, throwing himself on the grass at her feet, with a long sigh of content. "How you spoil one, dear, for other people's conversation!"

"I have not had a very alarming competitor this morning," she said, smiling.

"No; but if he had been an archangel, it would have made little difference. Go on, lady mine, talk to me—talk to me 'at lairge.' I want to hear your views about everything. Is not it delightful that we know each other so little?"

Mona laughed softly and then grew very grave.

"I hope you will say twenty years hence, 'How delightful it is that we know each other so well!'"

"I will say it now with all my heart! But it is very interesting to live when every little event of life, every picture one sees, every book one reads, has all the excitement of a lottery, till I hear your opinion of it."

Mona passed her hand through his hair. "Then I hope you will still say twenty years hence, 'How delightful it is that we know each other so little!'"

"I think there is little doubt of that. My conception of you is like a Gothic cathedral: its very beauty lies in the fact that one is always adding to it, but it is never finished. Or, shall I say of you what Kuenen says of Christianity?—'She is the most mutable of all things; that is her special glory.'"

"*Varium et mutabile* in fact! It is a pretty compliment, but I seem to have heard it before."

"*Varium et mutabile semper femina*," he repeated, smiling. "A higher compliment was never paid to your sex. *Varium et mutabile*—like the sea! I never know whom I shall find when I meet you,—the high-souled philosopher, the earnest student, the brilliant woman of the world, the tender mother-soul, the frivolous girl, or the lovable child. I don't know which of them charms me most. And when I want something more than any of those, before I have time to call her, there she is,—my wife, 'strong and tender and true as steel.'"

Mona did not answer. Her turn would come another time. They knew each other too well to barter compliments like goods and coin across a counter.

"I thought you were going to talk to me," he said presently. "Let us talk about the things that can never be put

into words. I
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and a home.
They had retu

had tested Maggie's "soups and sauces," had discussed ways and means by the fire in Mona's consulting-room; and now Ralph had gone through the curtained door into his own room adjoining, to look at his letters.

"I shall only be gone ten minutes," he had said, "if you invite me back. Nobody is likely to call on a night like this, even in 'blessed Bloomsbury.'"

Sir Douglas had begged them to settle in Harley Street, but both Ralph and Mona were far too enthusiastic to forego the early days of night-work, and of practice among the poor.

Ralph had scarcely finished reading his first letter when a patient was announced, and a moment later a young girl entered the room with a shrinking, uncertain step. Her hair was wet with the rain, and her white face expressionless, save for its misery.

"Do you wish to consult me?" he said. "Sit down. What can I do for you?"

She looked at him for a moment, and tried to speak, but her full lips quivered, and she burst into hysterical tears.

His practised eye ran over her figure half unconsciously.

"I think," he said kindly, "you would rather see the doctor who shares my practice," and he rose, and opened the door.

Mona looked up smiling.

She was sitting alone in the firelight, and his heart glowed within him as he contrasted her bright, strong, womanly face with—that other.

"Mona, dear," he said quietly, "here is a case for *you*."

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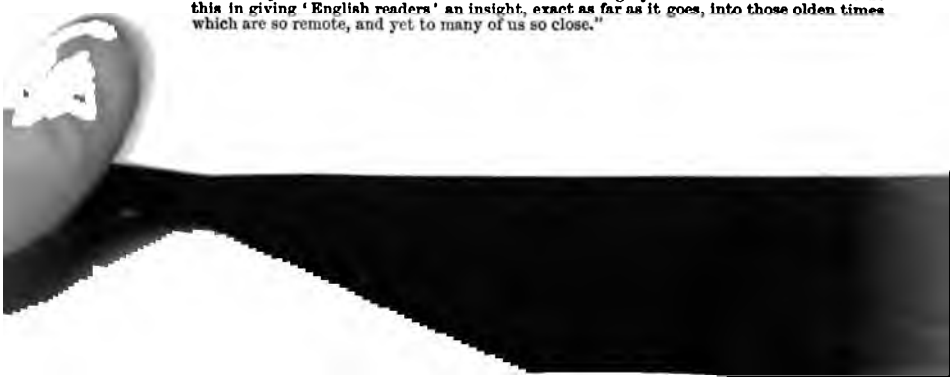

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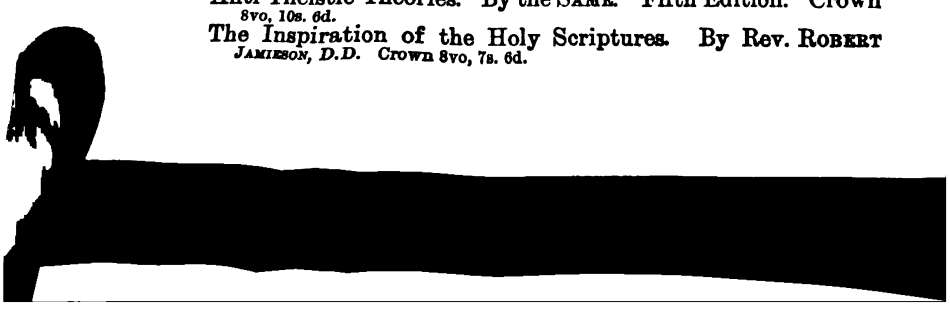

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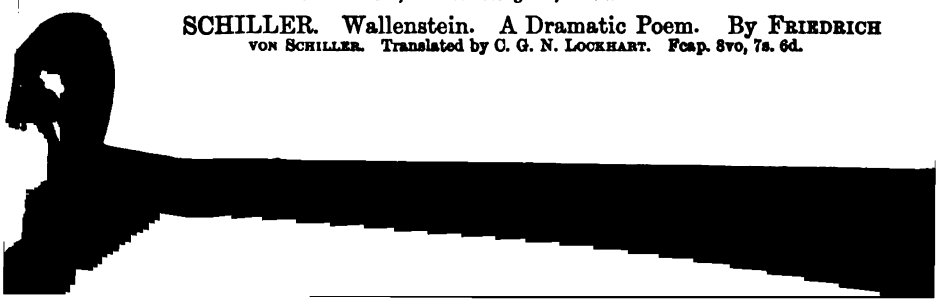

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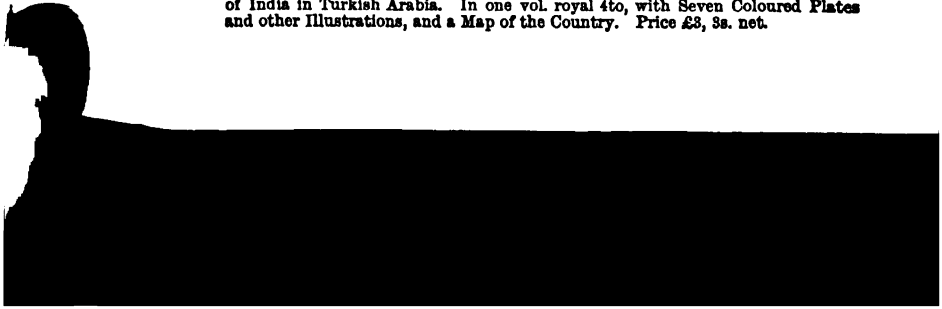

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